Internet News
- Key software Internet reviewed
- Getting yourself communicating

Education Extra
- What you get for free with TextEase
- Using digital cameras in education

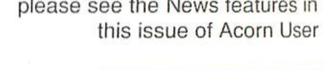


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ISSUE 231 MARCH 2001 £4.20

ingeniosus: see next, -ITY.] The ingenious; ingenuity.
ingenious /in'dʒi:niəs/ a. LME. f.) L. ingeniosus, f. INGENIUM: see -OUS. possessing high mental ability intelligent, discerning. Now making, inventing, or contriving curious or unexpected nature. Exemplifying high mental intelligence.

real **ingenuity**
(in-jen-new-it-ee) *n.*

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please see the News features in this issue of Acorn User







ri48.net

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md**omega**



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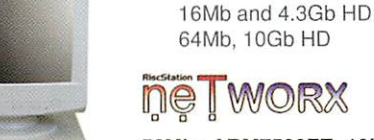
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r[i]

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March 2001

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The best-selling RISC OS magazine in the world

ACORN USER

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Internet News
- Key software internet reviewed
- Getting yourself communicating

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Features

Regulars

April issue on sale 22nd March 2001



We had a question this month in the Letters page from Brian Ferris, which I started to answer but then realisd there was rather more to say than would fit. The main thrust of his letter was in regard to RISC OS falling behind in Internet technologies.

The best way to look at this is to imagine that Acorn (the company) led us, their market, into a maze and then abandoned us in some forgotten corner. Regardless of one's opinion of them they were the leaders as it was up to them to produce the hardware and the support technologies to go with it.

So there we were, stuck in the maze. Every now and then there's been someone who pops up and says "this is the way out" and the route might be to go to Linux (the RISC OS-like front-end ROX is certainly an impressive piece of work), that seems like a quick and easy way out. So some people go off that way and it is an exit, maybe it's another maze but it's more brightly lit and there seem to be more people around.

Then there's the ones who don't like being in the maze, after all it is very dark and unfriendly. And just through that hedge over there is a brightly lit place where the PC playground is. Why not just forget the maze and go there — it's absolutely packed and there are some big bullies, but it must be better than here.

There are those who don't want to leave the maze but aren't really interested in getting out. One day the maze will probably be gone and they'll just wander off.

Finally there are those who want to get out properly but the trouble with mazes is that it often looks like you're moving away from the exit, but sometimes you have to before you can make further progress.

Of course without a clear leader you get arguments about which is the right way to go but on the whole I think we are making progress. We're about to hit a straight run in the right direction with the release of the Omega — Microdigital have briefed me on what's going on but all I can say is ... not long now. Also there is work going on on Web technologies but again I can't say very much. There is an exit to this maze which doesn't involve leaving the market. And we're nearly there.

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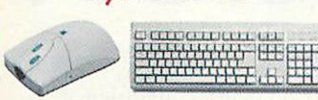
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requires RISCOS 3.6 /3.7 * requires RISCOS 4 or Partitioning s/w for only £25.00 + vat

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17" Iiyama Vision 700JT1	**£155.00**	£182.12
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All monitors inc 3 yrs wty unless specified

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Computer systems....................................£13 + vat
All prices are correct going to press. E&OE
All goods are fully guaranteed but not supplied on approval.

Put your money on a leader?

It was last year we learned about this unusual database that had been produced on a RISC OS computer and was initially intended for sale only to Windows users. Luckily someone put their foot down and the database was released with RISC OS compatibility. With an election predicted for this May the database now has topical interest and the publishers are making it available at £35 which is a reduced price for individual use.

The full network edition, designed for schools and colleges, was released at £120! The RISC OS friendly CD-Rom of British Parliamentary Constituencies also has Web support for the General Election and after, and the new Personal Edition is available at the reduced price with an additional special deal for Acorn users. The standard edition at £50 now includes a ten user site licence. The full network edition remains at £120. These are both available direct from Polemic Books or by order from any bookshop. The new personal edition is available at £35 direct from Polemic Books only.

As a special offer for Acorn enthusiasts any edition purchased direct from Polemic Books in February and March will be charged at the price excluding VAT. Don't forget to mention this offer.

To support users in schools, colleges and universities they have introduced Web-based updates and election coverage on **www.polemic publishing.co.uk** Click through the BPC support Icon and go to Election News to see a part of the information available on every constituency. British Parliamentary Constituencies on CD-Rom provides a complete analysis of voting in the 1992 and 1997 elections, with a social, economic and demographic profile of each constituency, and a pen portrait of the constituency and its member. The CD-Rom was authored on Risc PCs and it will run on RISC OS and Windows machines.

The CD-Rom, which was written by Professor Ivor Crewe of Essex University and Tony Fox, also contains the information on which it is based in Datapower and Excel formats which allow you to do 'what if' projections on the results of the forthcoming election.

Polemic Books, Marquis House, 2 North Street, Winchcombe, Glos GL54 5LH

Would you have scripted it?

One of the companies who are expected to make their mark at the Wakefield show is Cerilica who are responsible for two major graphics programs: *Vantage* and now *TopModel*. The *Vantage* program has be plagued by delays but the version about to be released includes almost all the originally promised features, together with additional ideas taken from beta-tester feedback.

Cerilica tell us that all the promised features are now ready for inclusion in the program. Another of Cerilica's programs, *RiScript*, has recently been upgraded. *RiScript* is a PostScript and PDF imaging program and can produce standard PDF files. Recent upgrades have added the ability to convert RISC OS to Type 1 fonts so that documents prepared under RISC OS can be correctly read on Mac and Windows machines without making the files over-large.

The latest upgrade now includes Text Export so that PostScript and PDF files from elsewhere can be imported into any RISC OS word-processor. A document ficould already be saved as a Drawfile.

It's evident that *RiScript* can produce industry acceptable PDF files from a comment received from Jim Lesurf. Jim produces excellent support pages for the *TechWriter* and *Composition* programs in his spare time but has also recently written a book. For previous books he had to supply 'camera ready' copy which didn't give quite the quality he hoped for and increased the cost of printing. For his latest book he supplied PDF files produced using *RiScript* and saved on a CD-R. His publishers (Institute of Physics Press) have said these were fine for use as the source for printing and giving Jim a better deal all round.

Cerilica Ltd, PO Box 40, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7WH cerilica@cerilica.com **www.cerilica.com**

Jim Lesurf's support pages include: TechWriter **www.st-and.demon.co.uk/TechWrite/Tips1.html** Compo **www.st-and.demon.co.uk/Compo/clues.html**



Music to your ears

Some people like their computers to be a television, radio, CD player and everything else at the same time as being a computer; others like their computers to stick to doing what they do best. We tend to agree with the latter sentiment although we do find that a Risc PC can make Teletext far more reasonable to use (thanks to Octopus Systems).

We are even willing to change our minds completely if someone produces a computer that also does the washing and ironing. In the meantime CTA are selling a machine that can complement your computer rather than add yet another function. The machine? It's an MP3 CD player — a portable CD player with a difference.

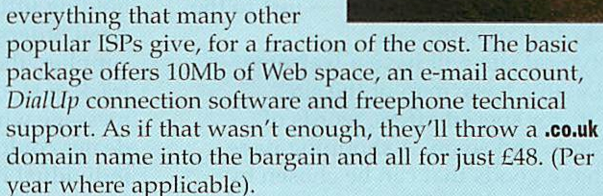


It can play normal audio (music) CDs as you would expect, but also CD-R discs and MP3 CDs.

When you consider that a CD can hold over 700 minutes of music (or other sound) as MP3s the product starts to look interesting. CTA point out that you can encode MP3s on the RiscStation R7500 Scorcher and do it faster than on any other RISC OS computer (using BladeEnc). Having encoded the MP3s you can burn them to CD, and play the music back on the MP3 player. You can even play through the computer using an appropriate audio cable. Using a portable player is far more flexible than being limited to playing the MP3s through the computer. The specifications of the M-Box machine include:

- Variable audio playback formats — standard audio CD, CD-R and MP3 CD
- 22-track Programmable Memory
- Auto power save mode after 2 minutes of non-operation
- 5 play modes — Normal / Repeat-1 / Repeat-All / Intro / Random
- Line out jack for CD-to-cassette adaptor (optional) and cigarette lighter adaptor (optional)
- Unit dimensions (W x L x Thk) — 132 x 158 x 30.5 mm
- LCD display (W x L) 45x15mm

Price just £99 + VAT
CTA 01942-797777 168 Elliott Street, Tyldesley Manchester M29 8DS



Quite ingenious really

Levens Software and Real Ingenuity have been trading names of The Levens Organisation for some time now. Real Ingenuity has been providing high quality graphic and Web design services while Levens Software has been active in the RISC OS world, and also in the contract IT market providing mainframe consultancy.

The decision has been taken to drop the Levens Software name and only trade as Real Ingenuity. Hence, Real Ingenuity is the new name for Levens Software, the RISC OS dealer for the Midlands. As a registered developer for everyone's favourite operating system, as well as appointed dealers for both RiscStation, Castle and MicroDigital and an approved authorised installer, we consider it very important to be at the forefront of the RISC OS world.

r[i] say that with their RISC OS heritage they are want to offer something special to the RISC OS community so they have a special offer for you. Currently, the best ISP in the world, as voted by readers of Internet Magazine, charges its customers £141 per year (inc VAT), for a dial-up connection to the Internet.



So this new service offers everything that many other popular ISPs give, for a fraction of the cost. The basic package offers 10Mb of Web space, an e-mail account, *DialUp* connection software and freephone technical support. As if that wasn't enough, they'll throw a **.co.uk** domain name into the bargain and all for just £48. (Per year where applicable).

You can add an extra 15Mb of Web space and four more e-mail accounts, plus scripting capabilities for the site, including CGI, Perl, SSI, PHP4, ASP and MySQL, all for just £48, and which has a free **.com** domain name. They can also have a 56k Voice/Fax/Modem, for just £48, or *WebsterXL* and *Messenger Pro* for just £48.

The only catch is that you have to sign up for a minimum twelve month contract. There will be an extra charge on administration if you want to move your domain name within the usual two-year registration period. Ingenious. (See adverts for more details)



Get your machine updated

RiscStation backup Resource CDs are now being issued. By the time this edition of *Acorn User* hits the streets all registered users of RiscStation R7500 computers should have received their CD. The CD provides users with all the software required to setup their R7500 computer per RiscStation's recommendation.

Users are encouraged to use the disc image software provided on the CD in preference to any older, previous versions. The CD also included a varied selection of useful Demo, PD, and Shareware software for users to try out. As well as the CD being sent out automatically to registered users, all RiscStation dealers and re-sellers will also have received a copy for support purposes.

If you are a RiscStation R7500 user and have not received your CD then it is most likely that RiscStation have not received your registration information.

RiscStation 01942 797 766



Go M@rket-Live!

Many large retailers have web sites which display their products and allow you to buy on line. Typically you can browse through the on-line shop, add goods to a 'shopping cart' and choose the 'checkout' option once you've chosen all that you need. It's then up to the retailer to deliver the goods and charge the appropriate sum to your credit card account.

Now Co-Comp have produced software to enable on-line shopping for use by smaller as well as larger retailers. M@rket Live! produces pages which the retailer can amend to their requirements and which has various levels of access for employees according to status. The customer's full credit card number is not made known to the retailer — just to the credit card company.

A typical site will have a welcome page with a basic map of the site, adverts for special offers, words of welcome, and so on. A shopping page will have goods that can be chosen by category and displayed in name, description or price order together with details including price and picture.

An item can be 'bought' and added to the 'shopping cart' which displays the running totals. Once the shopper has completed the purchases he can move to an invoice area where he or she can agree to pay by credit card. At this point the purchaser is transferred to the credit card company's secure line to pay the agreed sum and return to the shop once payment has been made. The transaction is made live (hence M@rket-live) and the retailer never has access to the purchaser's card number.

Anyone interested in such a program should look at the demonstration site at: **www.market-live.co.uk** Jeremy Coates of Co-Comp has obviously studied Jakob Nielsen (see elsewhere in this month's News) as the pages on the demonstration site are clear and fast to use.

Jeremy confirms that the program can be used by traders with full support from Co-Comp including Web Hosting and Design or sold as a package.

As examples of its use: a trader holding little or no stock could transfer retail orders directly to a wholesaler supplier; the Web database could keep track of stock and display an alternative message when out of stock; an antiques dealer could take digital photographs of individual items and load the photographs into the database which could automatically produce a thumbnail picture for the browse section and when sold automatically delete reference to the item or leave it displayed as sold but suggesting alternatives.

Co-Comp Box 199, Preston. PR1 9SS
enquiry@co-comp.co.uk 01772-496659
www.co-comp.co.uk

In brief

RISC OS Shows

As we go to press RISC OS dealers are making last minute preparations for the RISC OS South West Show. For many people the shows held throughout the year are the main chance to see and try out new software and hardware. The two major shows are at Wakefield and at Epsom and we have recently received confirmation of the next shows in each of the two locations.

Details are available for the sixth Acorn/RISC OS Show from the Wakefield Acorn Computer (User) Group. Once again the venue will be the Thornes Park Athletics Stadium, Horbury Road, Wakefield.

The show will be on Saturday and Sunday 19th and 20th May 2001. There's every chance of a number of interesting developments coming to fruition in time for Wakefield so that's a 'must' to go into your diaries.

Preparing for a show much later in the year, so not as far advanced with their organisation, are the RISC OS 2001 group. We have heard that Keith Dunlop of ROUGOL has been appointed chairman and organizer for this year's show in place of Mark Smith who led the organisation of last year's popular show, and who takes a different role on the organising committee this year.

A number of representatives from The ARM Club, SASAUG and ROUGOL make up the remainder of the committee, which is larger than last year's but includes almost all of the same people.

Flash in the pan

There has been some recent discussion about Flash on Web sites. There is a plug-in for RISC OS browsers which enables you to view Macromedia Flash files. The plug-in is *!Flash* ported by Leo Smiers who also produces a public domain PDF reader

Continued...

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Acorn

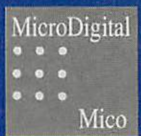
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R7500 Lite (with their 17" monitor)	£774.00
R7500 Lite (with their 19" monitor)	£891.00

The Lite+ model is the same as the Lite, but has an 8.4Gb HD and 64Mb RAM fitted as standard.
R7500 Lite+ — To Lite prices, please add £94.00

The Scorcher model is the same as the Lite, but has a 10Gb HD and 64Mb RAM fitted as standard, plus at least a 4x4x24 CD ReWriter, CD Burn and a blank disc.

R7500 Scorcher — To Lite prices, please add £315.00
R7500 Scorcher Twindeck (as Scorcher, with additional 48x CD drive) — To Lite prices, add £349.00

The Networx model is a Lite without the HD or CD fitted. Monitors are available as with the Lite.
R7500 Networx (no monitor) — £480.00

The Networx HD model is the same as the Networx, but has a (minimum of) 2Gb HD fitted as standard.
R7500 Networx HD — To Networx prices, add £59.00

Portable — £Call









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Touchscreen monitors	£Call

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32Mb FPM	£61.95
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128Mb EDO	£209.75
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Music & Sound Section

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Something new is coming soon...

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Parallel Port 1x1x1	£89.20
RiscStation drivers & cable	£17.95
RiscStation XG card & cable	£116.95
RiscStation XG card, cable & keyboard	£245.95
Synth 8 or Basic Synth	£46.95
Synth Plus	£58.65
Music & Sound Programmer's Guide	£16.95
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Evolution MK149 keyboard	£125.00
Fatar SL 760	£450.00
Fatar SL 880	£600.00
Fatar SL 1100	£800.00
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YST-M20 DSP speakers	£65.75
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YST-MS30 speakers & subwoofer	£149.00
YST-M100 speakers	£117.00
YST-MSW5 subwoofer	£59.00
YST-MSW10 subwoofer	£71.20
Yamaha MU15 sound module	£199.00
Yamaha MU128 module	£744.00
Other software:	
MediaPack	£23.95
MIDI Support	£18.50
Rhapsody 4	£94.95
Junior Sibelius	£49.00
Sibelius 6	£99.95
Sibelius 7 Student	£319.95
Sibelius 7	£520.95
Sibelius for Windows is also available	
Optical Manuscript	£259.00
Sound module serial driver	£37.95
Studiosound	£116.95

Other Hardware

Ethernet card (Combi NIC slot)	£116.30
Hard drives & kits	£Call
Mouse (Ergo)	£14.95
Mouse (PS/2 Logitech)	£12.95
Omega 10BaseT PCI card	£62.25
Omega SCSI 2 PCI card	£72.95
PS/2 pipe convertor for older machines	£23.95
Printers	£Call
Risc PC second slice (no PSU)	£95.00
RISC OS 4 (fitting available)	£120.00
RiscStation internal modem pack	£99.95
RiscStation second serial port	£Call
Scanners	£Call
StrongARM & RISC OS 3.7	£269.00
StrongARM & RISC OS 4	£299.00
Triple serial card	£99.95
ViewFinder card	£235.00

Other Software

Ankh	£23.00
CD Burn	£55.95
Chaos Engine	£19.50
DataPower 2	£165.00
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TBA Games CD	£20.00
TechWriter Pro+	£189.95
TopModel 2	£145.00
WebFX3D	£24.50

Books & Manuals

RISC OS Manuals CD	£29.95



Discs (e.g.10x white discs – £4.99, 20x black discs – £6.93, 50x black discs – £13.99)
Batteries (e.g. 4x AA Xtra alkaline – £1.96, 1x 9V alkaline – £1.92)
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RISC OS second user copy

We know that many of you have got more than one RISC OS computer. Our nearest User Group (MAUG) recently spent an evening showing how easy it was to network two or more RISC OS computers for file sharing etc. One problem of owning multiple machines is the cost of software and the cost of upgrading.

If you have two Risc PCs do you really want to spend over £200 to upgrade to RISC OS 4? Well now you don't need to; if you have already upgraded one machine to RISC OS 4 you can upgrade the second at a greatly reduced price.

You may now buy a second copy of RISC OS 4 for just £75 + VAT + postage/packing. The cost of despatch will vary according to the destination, but for UK users it is £1. To qualify for this offer you must have already returned your registration card for the first copy.

If you've so far resisted upgrading to RISC OS 4, but you have two or more machines that you want to upgrade, you can still participate in the offer. In this case when you place an offer for more than one copy of RISC OS the first copy will be charged at the normal price and the second will be charged at the £75 price. Note that the second set will only include the RISC OS 4 ROMs.

Order RISC OS 4 through your local Registered Dealer (see the adverts throughout the magazine) or from: RISC OS Ltd ro4orders@riscos.com and quote the serial number of your first set of RISC OS 4 ROMs.

Web-ability? You got it!

As the variety of machines connecting to the Web increase so more people will experience problems familiar to RISC OS users. Far too many site designers don't appreciate that the Web is meant to use an open protocol and design their sites to be viewed only on a machine like their own. Their complaint trays are soon likely to overflow with messages from people trying to access their 'MicroSoft only' sites using WAPs, the Bush net TVs (which use RISC OS hardware) and others including ourselves.

Although the complaints are frequently directed to 'designers' using Windows machines from people using non-Windows machines the matter is not, strictly, one of complaints between computer platforms. If you'd like to see the view from a neutral point of view then have a look at Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox: **www.useit.com/alertbox**

Jakob Nielsen has produced a bi-weekly web column since 1995 and in his latest column (4 February) argues that Web site designers are wrong to blame 'stupid users' for problems in navigating their sites.

He claims that the problems are for the designers to tackle and that so far it's mainly the more capable people that are accessing the Web. Previous columns have included:

Usability Metrics (January 21, 2001) Security & Human Factors (November 26, 2000) Drop-Down Menus: Use Sparingly (November 12, 2000) Flash: 99% Bad (October 29, 2000) Content Creation for Average People (October 1, 2000) New Devices Augur Decent Mobile User Experience (September 17, 2000) Regulatory usability (September 3, 2000) End of Web design (July 23, 2000) WAP backlash (July 9, 2000) Customers as designers (June 11, 2000) Reset and Cancel buttons (April 16, 2000) The mud-throwing theory of usability (April 2, 2000) Why you only need to test with 5 users (March 19, 2000) Novice vs. expert users (February 6, 2000) Is navigation useful? (January 9, 2000) When bad design becomes the standard (November 14, 1999) Graceful degradation of scalable Internet services (October 31, 1999) Ten good deeds in web design (October 3, 1999) The top ten new mistakes of web design (May 30, 1999) Who commits the "Top Ten Mistakes" in web design? (May 16, 1999) The difference between print design and Web design (January 24, 1999)

Anyone producing their own web site could well start by reading, and taking to heart, the four earliest of these columns. Anyone wanting to complain to a Web site designer could do worse than refer him or her to the AlertBox site. You might just help to produce some good Web sites.

In brief

program. Many commercial sites use the Flash format to make their site more attractive. Besides showing nice pictures and clips the Flash object also allows you to navigate through a site, therefore, without the right plug-in it was most times impossible to get past the "Get Shockwave" logo while running a WWW browser.

Although *Flash* is nearly a year old it has recently been upgraded and will now support the streaming protocol with *Oregano* version 1.10. While *Flash* does not support morphing or Flash4 features it will play Flash 4 files.

Although we now have the capability to view flash files not all sites will allow us to enter because they test for other required features or do not detect the *Flash* plug-in.

http://members.ams.chello.nl/l.smiers

Printing the best

More people are considering purchase of a laser printer now that prices have fallen and Clares Micro Supplies are selling the new Samsung ML4600 brings you high quality laser printing at an excellent price. The ML4600 is an HP6L compatible printer, which means it will work under RISC OS using the HP Laserjet drivers.

It also comes with a PC driver. If you use a PC, you will be interested to know that the ML4600 has both a parallel and a USB interface. The resolution is 1200dpi (but only 600dpi with the current RISC OS drivers) and has a speed of 8ppm. It comes with 4Mb of RAM. It also comes with a special toner save button for extra economy. The price is £228.00 inc VAT plus £12.00 p&p.

Clares Micro Supplies Ltd 75a Webbs Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9DS 01606-833999 sales@claresmicro.com **www.claresmicro.com**

Contacting AU

news@acornuser.com
John Cartmell



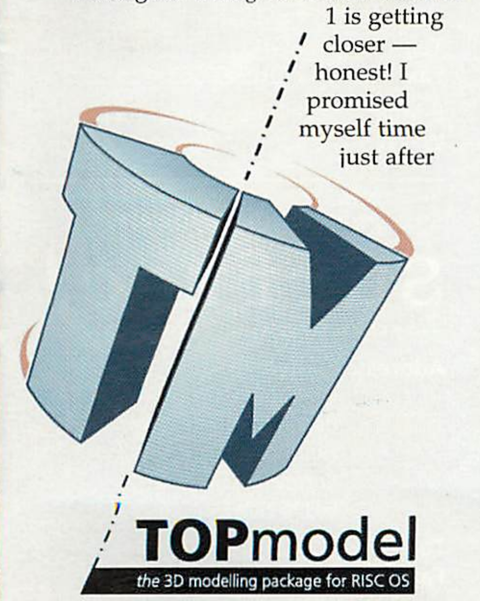
Nobody knows...

After three days at the BETT Show can I make a plea to you all? Upgrade! No, I'm not trying to do a Microsoft on you and demand that you upgrade every six months because your equipment is out of date — and scrap it all completely after two years.

But ... it's over four years since Martin Wuerthner started producing modules for *ArtWorks* — most of which are indispensable in my use of the program. There are freeware, shareware and commercial modules and I don't believe there is anyone using *ArtWorks* seriously who can't improve their productivity by using some (or all) of Martin's modules. For those of you who have discarded *ArtWorks* because of problems you're having — perhaps a glance at Martin's support page will help.

I only mention it because many people I met at BETT seemed to be using very old versions of *ArtWorks* and were unaware of the excellent work of Martin Wuerthner. Yes I did put them right.

It could be that you're all simply waiting for *Vantage* to arrive. Version 1 is getting closer — honest! I promised myself time just after Christmas to really get to grips with v 0.97c — then I was asked to spend some time chatting to all those nice people visiting BETT. My, still limited, view of *Vantage* is that it will be everything promised.



I couldn't get to grips with *ArtWorks* until I had to (*Draw* does have its limitations) but once I concentrated on using it, I was rewarded with a whole host of new opportunities. *Vantage* is sufficiently different from earlier programs to require — and reward — serious concentration.

Moving over to bit-mapped graphics, *Composition* is now a totally different program than the one I purchased just over 12 months ago. Its author, Rob Davison, has added a whole new method of using *Composition* using a scripting language called *CompoScript* (there were rumours that it would be called *Nora* — explanation not needed?). The latest version of *Compo* is 1.20 and by the time you're reading this there should be a demo of 1.20 available on his Web site (and presumably on disc from Clares who publish the program). I only mention it because of the many people at BETT who knew of none of the recent developments of *Compo*.

RiscStation and Castle were at the Show, together with Icon Technology, Photodesk, Surftec, Cumana/Cannon and yours truly. I even met our Editor in passing. We were there to dispense help, support, good ideas, a preview of last month's graphics column and confirmation that there really was an excellent and very much alive alternative to Windows. (OK so Castle did also succumb to the freebie stampede sufficiently to issue excellent free pens — thanks for mine).

My comments in this column so far have been limited to 2D graphics. Like most people I'm far more comfortable with 2D and 2D representations of the third dimension. Of course there are some tasks for which 3D is essential; I'm still struggling to answer a problem thrown at me during a graphics presentation I made at MAUG. That was to produce an illustration of threads in a weave.

Cerilica intend to stir us out of our 2D-limited world. Soon after you read this column Cerilica will be releasing *Top Model*, Sincronia's 3D modelling program. The re-released version will answer criticisms of the earlier product with a proper manual/tutorial to make the learning curve simpler. As soon as I get my hands on a copy I'll be testing that claim. As I haven't used *TopModel* before (I use *Da Vinci* from Aspex for any 3D work) I should be the perfect guinea pig — and this guinea pig will be reporting back all its 3D learning problems to you. I might even have an answer to the thread problem!

Contacting AU

graphics@acornuser.com
John Cartmell

Composition	Clares Micro Supplies Ltd, 75a Webbs Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9DS Tel: 01606 833999; Web: **www.claresmicro.com** also at **www.st-and.demon.co.uk/Compo/clues.html**
Vantage & TopModel	Cerilica Ltd, PO Box 40, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7WH Tel: 0870 2411731; Web: **www.cerilica.com**
ArtWorks Modules	Martin Wuerthner; Web: **www.mw-software .com**



Play it loud

Ex-Acorn enthusiast Jonathan Gutteridge and Dan Hewitt are responsible for DarkHoleFM, a new Internet Radio station that they hope will become the future of online entertainment.

They started running test MP3-streamed programmes last December, deejayed by Dan and produced by Jonathan. Their programming currently includes Dance, Rock and Pop at **www.thedarkhole.co.uk**

Unfortunately no Acorns were used in making the programme, but to hear the show RISC OS browser *Fresco*© and *WebsterXL* users will need a copy of *MP3Radio*, the browser plug-in by Philip Hardy of KiwiSoft.

Current versions of *MP3Radio* are hard to find, but you can find a good working version in the Arcade BBS filebase Web pages at **www.arcade-bbs.net/filepages/file88.htm**

You will need to set up your RISC OS machine to launch the MP3 playlist **.pls** files by editing that mysterious "MimeMap" file inside your *Internet* application. The *MP3Radio* help file explains how to do this, and shows the required adjustments to the *Fresco* and *WebsterXL* browser configurations. However neither of them would to play the programme by clicking on the Web page link on my machine but you may be more successful.

While we're on the subject of Internet Radio, I've become a part-time consultant for a London-based Rock and Metal music station with a great deal of computer technology at its heart. We use PCs for digital recording, editing and playout on hard discs and minidiscs; ADSL connection by **iomart.com** for office e-mail and Web browsing, and an ISDN line for FTP access to the Sky Digital EPG "what's on now" information system.

The live station audio output is digitised and sent via a leased-line 128Kilostream X21 data link to the ground-station of the Astra 2A satellite from which it's broadcast on Sky Digital Channel 950. An off-air downlink feed is encoded and streamed to the Web site by a remote Windows Media server. But RISC OS doesn't get a look in anywhere, so you won't be interested in the URL which is **www.totalrock.com**



Your mother wouldn't like it

The Dark Hole
Home of DarkHoleFM
"The Future of Online Entertainment"

The whole future of Internet Radio?

In brief

Cold chilli

RedHotAnt, the Kent-based ISP which introduced 24/7 unmetered Internet calls with Acorn support last summer, seems to have foundered. They have withdrawn un-metered access and put into doubt the chance of refunds or compensation for any subscriber.

The UK un-metered Internet access fiasco (or should that be FRIACO?) perpetuated by OFTEL and BT is taking its toll, as time runs out on ISPs' business models that rely on the early arrival of Flat Rate Internet Access Call Origination. I'm happy paying for my connection. Are you?

Telly too? No.

I've just missed the broadband bargain of the year. Tele2 UK's trial "Wireless-DSL at Home" line-of-sight system provides residential customers with 'always on' un-metered Internet access at up to 150Kbps for £9.99 per month and a £50 installation charge (all inc VAT).

A small microwave aerial installed on your roof connects the Internet via a Speedbox Ethernet interface to your PC. Their national coverage is expected in "early 2001".

Tele2 UK Ltd
www.tele2.co.uk

No rules

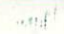
Nick Boalch's "Silver Suggestions" are good guidelines for newsgroup netiquette; or how to conduct yourself considerately in public postings to newsgroups.

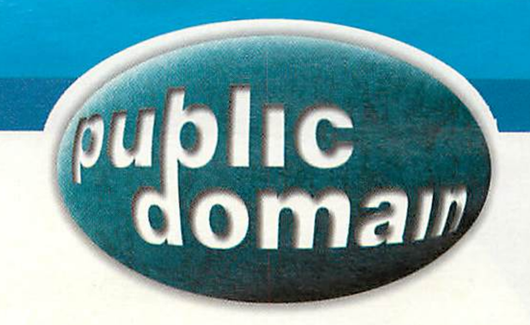
Nick also recommends the groups **news.announce.newusers** and **news.answers** newsgroups for items such as the tongue-in-cheek guide "Emily Postnews Answers Your Questions on Netiquette" by Brad Templeton, also found at **www.clari.net/brad/emily.html**

Nicholas Boalch
www.durge.org/~ngb/scribblings/silver.html

Contacting me

David Dade:
comms@acornuser.com





The data pathway

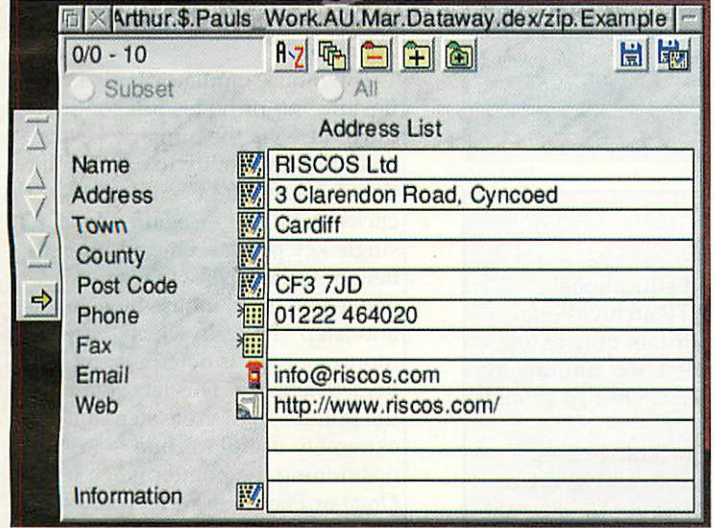
One genre of software that RISC OS users aren't hard up for is database applications. There are numerous commercial offerings available as well as a good selection of shareware and PD choices.

DataWay is a shareware one written by Bernard Veasey. The only limitation to unregistered users is a restriction of only 22 records in each database. Registration costs only £15.00 and increases the capacity up to 2000 records per database, although Bernard can extend this if you contact him with particular requirements.

Several examples are provided, along with comprehensive manuals in HTML, *Ovation* or *Impression* format. However, use is straightforward and beginners can soon start to create their own databases.

DataWay has several features generally only found on much more complex, and hence expensive, applications. One such feature is the ability to define a particular data type to each field. This lets you define particular fields as e-mail addresses or Web page URLs and so on, and will launch the relevant field data into any recognised 'helper' application.

A use of this could be to store your favourite Web addresses or friends e-mail addresses as a stand alone 'hotlist and address book' application.



Not only can you launch field data into other applications but you can also launch whole applications as well. This is because you can assign a "filer_run" command to each field, effectively meaning that DataWay can execute the contents of a field in the same way as if you'd double-clicked on the contents.

Another feature is the ability to 'dial' telephone number entries via DTMF tones from the computer's speaker.

As you can see from the screenshot, each *DataWay* entry includes a sidebar containing simple-to-use navigation controls; next/previous records and first/last record as well as a 'goto' a specific record.

The top toolbar contains icons for sorting records, searching, deleting/adding records as well as saving and exporting data. The export facility is also flexible, allowing you to export either all the data or selected fields in either plain text, CSV or Impression data formats.

If you wish to protect wandering eyes from looking at your data there is also a password facility so that you can lock access to your data files until your chosen password has been entered successfully.

If you're looking for a simple-to-use, yet effective database solution, which is also capable of storing your Internet links and e-mail addresses, then pop over to Bernard's Web site at **www.bapfish.org.uk** and download a copy to test drive.

Who borrowed it?

Still on the subject of databases, Ian Molton has provided a rudimentary yet effective way of remembering who you've lent that long lost book or CD to.

If you, like me, tend to lend things to friends only to forget who when, six months later you suddenly realise you can't find the article, then *Lender* is for you. *Lender* is a simple database system with preset fields for item, date and who you lent the item for. Each time you lend something to a friend, you just enter a new record and it will be stored — ready for you to consult in a few months time when you're hunting for the required item and you've completely forgot that you lent it out.

Lender stores entries automatically and only consists of two options; add and delete, so it's simple, easy-to-use and effective. You can download it from **www.users.zetnet.co.uk/hawk/freesoft.html**

Now, who did I lend my copy of *Acorn User* to...

Top Ten Links:

(courtesy of www.riscos.org)

No.	Visits	Description
1	45	FreeNet - Freeware TCP/IP stack [more] Homepage: http://www.compton.demon.co.uk/freenet/ Status: ?
2	27	Yass2 - 'Yet Another Screen Saver': says it all really , by Ian Palmer [more] Homepage: Status: Freeware
3	21	WavEdit - A disk based WAV format sample editor, by Robert Hancox [more] Homepage: http://www.tophole.freeserve.co.uk/software/wav.htm Status: ?
4	14	ChangeFSI RC - a new version of Acorn's image processing program - converts sprites to JPEG and just about anything to sprites, by Acorn [more] Homepage: http://www.arsvcs.demon.co.uk/webster/download/ Status: Freeware
5	13	Complete Animator - an all in one animation package with tutorial video, by Iota Software [more] Homepage: http://www.iota.co.uk/products/default.htm Status: Commercial
6	11	VProtect - Latest virus protection module, by Pineapple Software [more] Homepage: http://www.pineaple.demon.co.uk/instv.zip Status: ?
7	11	POPstar2 - Improved version of POPstar, by Joseph Heenan [more] Homepage: http://www.ping.demon.co.uk/acorn/ Status: ?
8	11	Browse updates - Version 2.06 and 2.07 upgrades for Acorn Browse, by Acorn [more] Homepage: http://www.carlbob.freeuk.com/freeuk.com/c/a/r/carlbob/webspace/browse/upgrade.html Status: ?
9	10	VideoPlus - converts VideoPlus codes into times and dates and vice vers, by James MacDonald [more] Homepage: http://www.netbook.demon.co.uk/ Status: Freeware
10	9	ArcLynx - RISC OS port of the text based web browser Lynx, by Andrew Wood [more] Homepage: http://www.cus.umist.ac.uk/~ivarch/acorn.html Status: ?

Oi! Waynetta! No!

SLOB? No, it's not a character by Harry Enfield, but an old educational program I discovered while digging around the Argonet FTP archives one day. *SLOB* stands for SpotLight on Britain and is a round Britain quiz to test your geographical knowledge. Although written back in 1991 and running in single-task mode, it still runs on my SA Risc PC running RISC OS 4 so should run on any RISC OS machine.

You can choose to be tested on one of a range of topics including cities, ports, hills and peaks, rivers, islands, inland or coastal features and so on, or you can opt for 'mixed' questions, which will allow the computer to select the topic for you.

The questions consist of colouring a particular area on a map outline of Britain, followed by a selection of multiple choice answers. Your task is to press the number corresponding to the correct answer. Fail and you get asked again before going onto the next question when you answer correctly.



There are is a reasonably large selection of questions so it should be some time before questions get repeated, and all the time you'll be improving your knowledge of basic geography.

SLOB can be downloaded from the public software archives at **ftp://ftp.argonet.co.uk/pub/Acorn/PD/Education/**

Mouse outages

David Pilling is one name that will be familiar to most RISC OS users as somewhat of a saviour, especially when it comes to scanner TWAIN drivers or DTP development (he's the author of *OvationPro*). He's also the author of the indispensable *SparkFS* and a number of other, often overlooked, utilities. *KeyFix* is just one such example.

Put simply, it's a module for 'fixing' the operation of the Shift, Control and Alt keys and also for emulating the mouse via the keyboard. This will have benefits not only for people who have broken or lost their mouse and want to control the pointer with the keyboard but also for users who may have disabilities or difficulty pressing two keys at once.

KeyFix can be configured to give 'locks' for the control, shift and alt. This work in exactly the same way as Caps Lock and can also provide audible feedback to verify operation.

The mouse emulator is also very flexible and provides full control of the mouse via the numeric keypad, including the ability to emulate the three buttons and even double-clicks and drags — again all via single key presses. One additional benefit is the facility to toggle between normal mouse movements and 'step' mode, in which the mouse pointer is determine by a preset step size. This lets you move the pointer in discrete steps and is extremely useful for fine positioning the pointer when using *Draw* or *Photodesk* and so on.

Although the actual mouse speed and step size can be configured via a Choices window, they can also be interactively tuned while in use, by hitting the keypad + and – keys.

Full instructions are included with the utility, which can be downloaded from David's Web site **http://pilling.users.netlink.co.uk/soft.html**

Contacting AU

Paul Vigay:
pdpage@acornuser.com

Musicality

Alan Gibson gives the low-down on the current and future music scene for RISC OS

The RISC OS music market has been changing markedly over the past year or so. With the demise of Acorn, several of the long-established companies have gone on to other things, for example the PC platform.

However, with the advent of new machines from several manufacturers, many more people now have access to sound and music facilities as the majority of the new machines have these built in by default. This has come about because the new machines use standard chipsets as used in PCs.

With these systems, sound input is usually provided by Line In and Mic In jacks, allowing you to record from mini disc players, Hi-Fis and microphones etc. MIDI is usually provided by a 'Soundblaster' connector — a 15-way socket which looks like a shortened printer port.

This can be used to plug in either a PC joystick or a MIDI 'breakout' cable which contains a small amount of electronics inside the plug, connected to two long MIDI cables. This allows you to connect a keyboard or sound module to your computer for less than £10, a fraction of the cost of doing a similar thing with previous machines.

One of the most exciting developments being worked on now is a general standard programming specification for sampling. In the same way that *Printers* provides a standard printing interface to applications regardless of printer, this sampling protocol will allow all compatible capture applications to use any sampler without having to know the details of the hardware attached.

It is anticipated that this will become a RISC OS standard which will finally eliminate the incompatibilities caused by each application having to have its own drivers written and hence only supporting certain samplers. To give a round up of the current situation in the marketplace, I have contacted most of the commercial companies who have been involved in music and sound applications in the past and present.

Most of their products are available from the usual dealers as well as from themselves. I also contacted the main computer manufacturers for their comments and have listed everyone in alphabetical order, with contact telephone numbers and Web sites. I have not covered any public domain or freeware software here as there is so much.

Sound of silence

Castle Technology
01728 723200
www.castle.org.uk

I asked Castle if they would hint at any specs for future machines and the response was "No comment". Which I kind of expected.

Portable power

City Audio Services
01634 845878
www.cityaudioservices.co.uk

Julian Coleman has a wealth of experience in sound recording, including work for BBC Radio and uses RISC OS machines in preference to other platforms for commercial audio production as, like many of us, he finds them more productive and reliable. He currently uses a Risc PC with *ProSound* and *StudioSound* software using Irlam's i16 digital and analogue sampling card. Having found problems with the software supplied with the i16, he commissioned new software which is also available for other *i16* owners to buy. Among other projects, CAS have recently completed a set of pre-recorded announcements for train stations.


The CAS recorder is based on the Riscstation portable

From his experiences of working in diverse and unforgiving situations on assignments, Julian is developing a pet project to build a portable audio processing system in order to reduce the amount (and weight) of equipment needed to take on such assignments.

On a recent trip to the Peruvian Andes, this equipment included an A4 portable, plus mini disc and portable DAT recorders, all of which were prone to attack from the harsh environment of the area.

The idea is that the portable computer, based on a RiscStation motherboard, can be slung over the shoulder (closed for protection) like a tape recorder would, with external controls for recording/playback and so on, a bit like on a Psion Series 5. The computer would then speak to you through the headphones to give

you feedback as to what it was doing. Very neat.

Once back at base, the portable can then be opened and used as a normal computer for processing and editing together the recordings and sending the results down ISDN lines at broadcast quality. The extra bits of software have been written using *Dr Wimp* for ease of writing desktop programs. CAS are building this machine for their own use at the moment, so please don't expect to see it at your local dealer just yet.

Towards the future, CAS are looking forward to being able to use standard PCI cards (obviously with RISC OS drivers) in order to advance their digital recording capabilities and are involved with the standard sampling specification as mentioned in the introduction. They are also willing to act as a focal point for other developers who are looking to produce compatible products, be it with ideas or finance.

Wax rhapsodic

Clares Micro Supplies
01606 833999
www.claresmicro.com

Clares are one of the longest established music software developers. Their *Rhapsody* range of software allows conventional notation-based music to be created and played back easily and the printed output is of a very high quality. Although *Rhapsody 3* is still available, *Rhapsody 4* is the flagship product and is still under continual development by its author.

Unlike Sibelius, *Rhapsody* works in the normal desktop environment, allowing you to multitask with other applications more easily and to play back while doing something else, for example.

The *Serenade* and *Rhythm Bed* sequencers are also still available and they tell me that *Vox Box* is on special offer while stocks last.

Getting MIDI in

CJE
01903 523222
www.cje.co.uk

CJE are still able to supply the MidiMax II cards, originally developed by Computer Concepts and then by ESP. This is the current entry-level card, with MIDI IN, OUT and THRU ports.

Smooth operator

The Data Store
020 8460 8991
www.the-datastore.co.uk

As well as being a specialist music dealer, The Data Store have long been established as one of the premier *Sibelius* dealers and are now the official distributors and technical support contacts for the RISC OS versions of *Sibelius* (Sibelius the company deal with the PC and Mac versions). All four versions are available (Junior, 6, 7 Student and 7) as well as site licences and bundles. Sibelius 7 is the 'killer' application which made many composers buy Acorns just to run it.

Although no longer developed, even today there are still a few things it can do which the PC/Mac version can't (for example syncing to SMPTE) and several people still use it in preference just because it's often faster and the machines are more reliable.

Power of thought

Expressive Software Projects
0115 944 4140
www.espmusic.co.uk

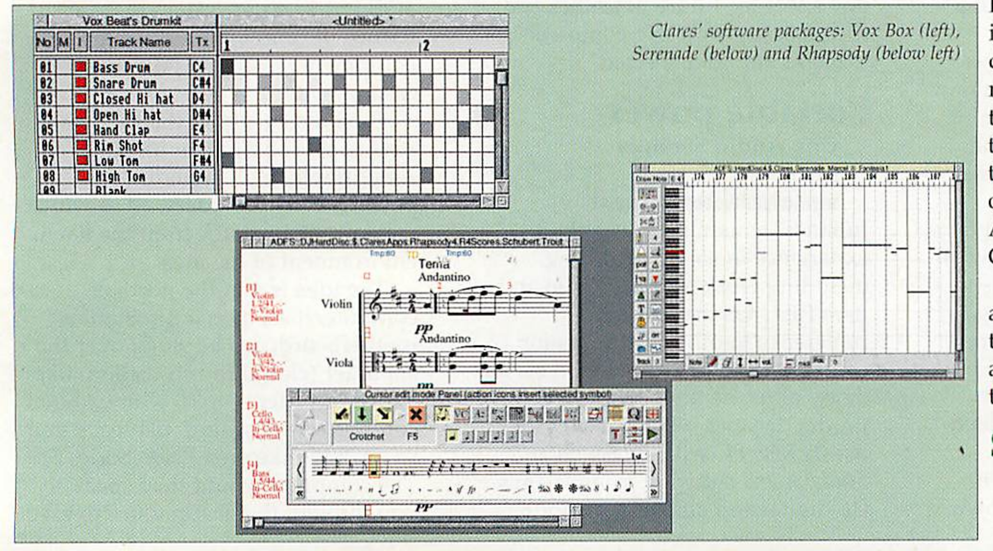
ESP were one of the most prolific producers of RISC OS music products, both with hardware MIDI interfaces and with software. They took over Computer Concepts' *MIDI Max* card and Audio Dynamics' *DMI* and *PowerWAVE* cards and updated them all with *MIDISupport* software (which allows multiple cards in one machine and software mapping of inputs to outputs). They also produced serial and parallel port MIDI interfaces for all machines and a software synth, allowing faster machines to emulate a sound module in software.

These days most of their work is in the PC marketplace and they no longer develop RISC OS hardware. However, the *MIDIMax II* card is still available via CJE (and dealers) and Liquid Silicon recently commissioned them to produce another batch of the parallel port interfaces as these are all you can use on older machines, for example A4000s and on A7000s with CD drives fitted.

Their main software applications are still available to order, including *Synth Plus* and *Compose World*, although these are not being developed.

Sample power

Irlam Instruments
01753 512520



Clares' software packages: Vox Box (left), Serenade (below) and Rhapsody (below left)

www.irlam-instruments.co.uk
Irlam have produced several professional quality audio/multimedia cards over the years and the most recent has been the *i16* card.

This has the usual 16-bit stereo analogue facilities but in addition is the only card to have digital inputs and outputs as well. However, due to problems obtaining parts in the future, they are only able to make up another dozen or so cards. If you are thinking of getting one, get it now!

Music specialist

Liquid Silicon
01592 592265
www.liquid-silicon.com
Liquid Silicon have specialised in music since their beginning and it is still a large part of their business, despite diversifying into bar coding and EPOS systems (and something else which is not being announced yet). As well as being general dealers, they are the distributors for *MelIDI*, one of the most powerful and user-friendly sequencers available for RISC OS.

The author of *MelIDI*, Stephen Borrill, is the owner of Precedence Technologies who supply NC systems and related technologies. For future versions of *MelIDI*, he would like to put sample playback (and recording) back in and include sync master and sync slave support, plus other interesting features.

Early versions of *MelIDI* supported samples using CC's *AudioManager*, but it was limited to 8-bit sound and only to a few cards. With the advent of the standardised sampling interfacing, they are looking at putting this back in, which would allow MIDI and audio sequencing in one package. *MelIDI* has it's own separate Web site: **www.melidi.co.uk**

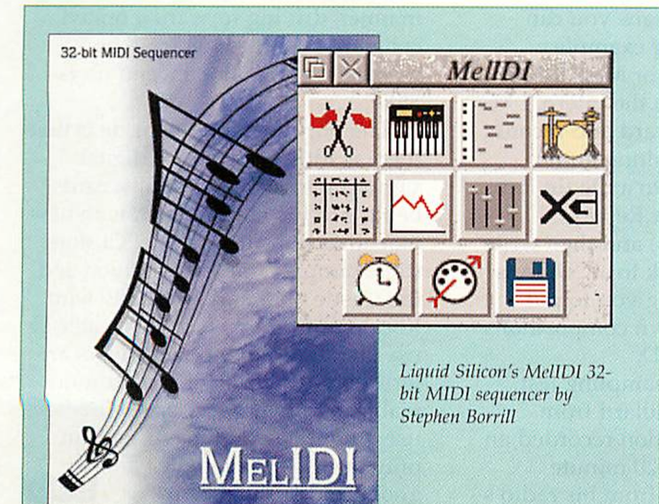
First with Omega

Microdigital
01274 618774
www.microdigital.co.uk
I contacted MicroDigital for sound details on their forthcoming Omega machines. Although some details have not been finalised yet, they are intending to support two specific PCI soundcards.

The basic card will have a Crystal chip set, 16-bit stereo sampling and playback from 4-48kHz, with a 20-voice synthesiser plus the usual microphone input, speakers and the Soundblaster-type MIDI connection as mentioned previously. Their more advanced card will likely be a top of the range Crystal card.

Sound studio

Oregan Developments
0121 353 6044
Website is being relocated
Oregan became one of the largest music software developers before evolving into Oregan Networks, although Oregan Developments still provide their RISC OS products such as *ProSound*, *StudioSound* and *MIDIWorks* and can provide technical support via e-mail. However, there are no plans to provide further developments of these products at present.



Liquid Silicon's MelIDI 32-bit MIDI sequencer by Stephen Borrill

The Archers?

R-Comp Interactive
01925 755043
www.rcomp.co.uk
RCI are a company with many strings to their bow (sorry, had to get that in somewhere!). They have just announced an update to their sequencer package, *Anthem*, which now has better support for System Exclusive MIDI messages.

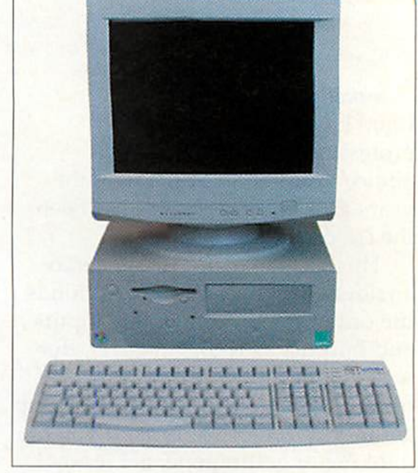
This allows better use of Yamaha sound modules in particular, which use SysEx messages for practically everything, including the XG sound card supplied with RiscStation *Accent* packs.

RCI are one of the other companies supporting the standardised sampling API mentioned previously and have "ongoing developments in sample processing software" which should be something to look forward to. I'll leave you to interpret that!

They are also a music dealer, having stocks of most ESP products






Riscstation's R7500 has versatile music capabilities

including the last few 16-bit soundcard upgrades for 8-bit Risc PCs. Andrew Rawnsley tells me he is also interested in hearing from musicians for some composing work...

Accent on music

RiscStation
01942 797766
www.riscstation.co.uk

In addition to the current range of Accent upgrades for RiscStation machines (XG card, MIDI drivers and so on), they are planning to offer complete systems designed from the outset for music production, from initial composition, to mixing, printing and recording. A typical system will consist of a selection from:

Yamaha XG sound card, fitted internally; 15", 17" or 19" monitor; A master/controller MIDI keyboard for playing notes in; CDR/W drive for recording your own CDs; *MelIDI* sequencer software; *Sibelius 6* notation software; A3 printer, possibly Postscript, for printing music. Prices will range from around £1200 including VAT for a standard system to £2000 for everything with a 19" monitor. They plan to demonstrate the systems to educational institutions, for example universities, and have already had good feedback from previous demonstrations.

Musically, the RiscStation machines have a Soundblaster-compatible codec chip, with integrated MIDI port (internal wavetable connector and external Soundblaster port which also supports four standard digital joysticks). In addition to the internal computer's sound, they have external Line In and Mic In jacks, plus an internal CD audio connection and an auxiliary connection, which can connect to a second CD drive or the internal MIDI card.

This gives five different sound sources, all of which can be mixed and controlled through the supplied software. Sampling rates go up to 52kHz (in 16-bit stereo) in as small as 1Hz steps. Recording is separate from playback and is done in the background so you can use the computer for other things while sampling. You can also therefore record from one of the sources while playing back or monitoring something else.

You will note I mentioned MIDI as one of the sound sources. This means you can play, for example a *Sibelius* or *MelIDI* file through the internal XG sound card and record the resulting audio output to a file (in Raw, Wave or Replay formats) and then write the track to a CD, thus allowing you to put your own compositions on to CD.

In a sampling test, Mark Gillard from RiscStation recorded an 8 hour, 20 minute sample from his radio's headphone socket. The whole file took about 1.3Gb in disc space, sampled in mono at 22050hz, 16-bit, all recorded in one session.


What's to come? Who can say...

Another interesting project on the cards is the further development of some voice recognition software which already exists in simpler form in the public domain. This is unlikely to be actual voice recognition, but software which can respond to preset voice commands (or sounds) and perform actions. This could have a myriad of uses – I'm waiting to sample my telephone ring so my machine can pause its CD player when a call comes in!

The future

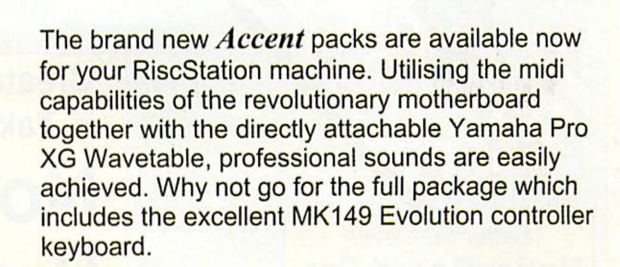
With most new machines having analogue sampling and MIDI built in, at last people have access to cost-effective hardware. And with the new sampling protocols, future software should all work in a similar manner, driving forward a united, coherent system which will be beneficial to developers and users alike.

The only current downside is that there is little demand for digital sampling to justify specialist cards being produced. However, with new machines appearing with PCI slots (for example Omega, Evolution and the Castle one) and especially with XScale processors, we will be able to use standard PC cards if drivers are written for them. This is a far more viable solution for the specialist users out there and the future can only bring even more PCI goodies to our platform. END

'Accent' Midi kits from RiscStation Ltd. including



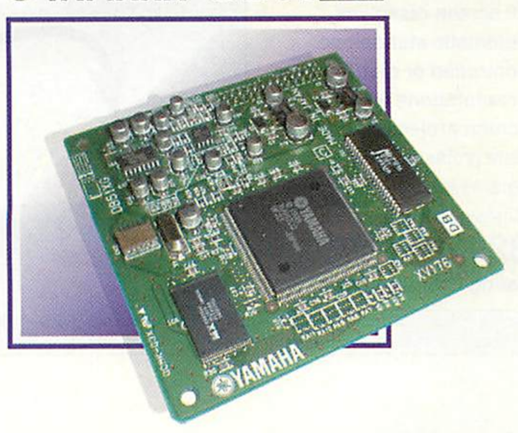




The brand new *Accent* packs are available now for your RiscStation machine. Utilising the midi capabilities of the revolutionary motherboard together with the directly attachable Yamaha Pro XG Wavetable, professional sounds are easily achieved. Why not go for the full package which includes the excellent MK149 Evolution controller keyboard.

Probably the best selling MIDI controller keyboard in the world, the **Evolution MK-149** has 49 full size touch sensitive keys, pitch-bend and mod wheels, 6 memories, octave shift and transpose buttons. The MK-149 can be battery-powered, PSU powered or take its power directly from your RiscStation machine via the Midi cable supplied. *No wonder this keyboard is the winner of 7 top magazine awards!*

YAMAHA® DB51 XG





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Please ring for more details

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Web : www.riscstation.co.uk

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Manchester
United Kingdom
M29 8DS

Where the MP3 takes you

What music can you get free online? Rob Donaldson knows

Music has always played a major part in my life. I've always listened to music on the radio, from back in the days of the BBC Light Programme, the Third Service (now Radio Three) and of course Radio Luxembourg. From a very early age I listened to my elder brother's collection of 45s and even my father's selection of 78s.

Then I bought my first single — *Keep On Running* by The Spencer Davies Group and from there, in my early teens, I progressed into albums with *Every Picture Tells A Story* from Rod Stewart being the first 12in piece of vinyl in my collection. Two years later I remember the mind-blowing experience the first time I heard this and several other albums played on a stereo record deck.

Over the years, other media for listening to music have come along, and some have them have long gone too. I had a reel-to-reel tape recorder which we all realised was going to be superseded by either 8-track stereo or cassette tape recorders. I chose the right option and got myself a cassette recorder (mono of course).

Next came VHF or FM as they call it now. Being able to listen to music on the radio in stereo — wow! what more could they do? It was digital technology which saw the next real leap with listening to and recording music. Soon CDs replaced vinyl and the long hard struggle to convert the old record collection into CDs began. You could even listen to CDs through your computer sound systems.

There was also DAT which seemed to come and go in short order. Then there were television music channels like MTV and VH1 on satellite TV, which allowed you to listen to and watch musicians perform live or, as is more often the case, watch the video. Now there is digital television with Dolby stereo sound, and let's not forget the emergence of digital radio.

Making your own recordings though didn't seem to be supported in quite the same way as commercially produced media for listening to. CDs were read-only and DAT was too expensive. The answer came along, just as CD writers for computers were becoming available at a reasonable price.

MP3s revolutionised the way people could record and replay music. Quite simply an MP3 is a file which contains digitally recorded sound which has been compressed so that it can be stored on your hard drive at about 1Mb per minute of sound and, more importantly, can be written to CDs using commonly available CD writers.

Now you can buy MP3 players which can be programmed to play MP3 files which you download into them from your computer or CD player. There are even MP3 dictaphones — devices which record what you speak into a microphone as an MP3 file and to play back later.

The emergence of MP3 has given record companies cause for concern. No longer do they have a monopoly on distributing digitally recorded music to the public. Many illegal sites were set up on the Internet where you could go and download music in breach of copyright. Other methods of getting hold of your favourite music in MP3 format cheaply is to go to the many newsgroups available on the Usenet.

There are groups there which enable you to select which decade you want to download music from. You can download talking books, Celtic music and there is (of course) a whole group dedicated to the music of The Beatles. My personal favourite is **alt.binaries.music.mp3.1970s**. Once again though I should warn you that the people who are making these sound files available for downloading and the people who are downloading them are in breach of copyright.

Legal MP3 sites

There are a load of sites on the Internet which feature MP3 files which are perfectly legal to download. The music found on these sites are either copyright-free or they are samples of work which musicians have made available to encourage you, the listener, if you've liked what you've heard, to part with some money to allow you to hear more.

The biggest and best known of these sites is MP3.com (**www.mp3.com**) and here you can find music to suit all tastes, from Alternative, through Blues, Classical, Country, Easy Listening, Electronic, Hip Hop/Rap, Jazz, Latin, Metal, Pop/Rock, Urban/R&B to World/Folk, plus Books, Spoken Word and Children's Music. MP3.com has charts for each style of music and there is even a chart called The Bottom 40 — I'll leave it up to you to find out what you get from that particular page.

The site is easy to use and contains advice on downloading MP3 players which will allow you to listen to MP3 music and sound files. They also list the five best ways of browsing the site for the music you want to hear. You can go to the

Musical styles page where all the different styles of music have been categorised, click on the category you want and off you go. Then there is the Features page which MP3.com experts select new songs to feature.

Again, just pick your favourite style and you can then go back through the archive of featured tracks. There is a weekly updated top 40 which quite simply lists the top 40 played MP3s on the site. Or there is a local music page which allows you to browse through music from bands and artists from your own local area. Finally, listeners to MP3.com have set up Web sites of their own which act as sort of like radio stations which feature the favourite sorts of music that the listeners prefer. You can browse through a list of the many 'Stations' to visit on MP3.com

Also available on the site is information on getting hold of MP3 hardware and software, although though this is mostly for PC or Macintosh users. Other facilities are available: information on where to buy instruments and sound equipment, a place to visit if you have CDs to swap. You can send e-mails to other collectors and catch up with the latest MP3 music news. All in all a comprehensive site for music enthusiasts.

Another big, well-organised site is eMusic (**http://emusic.com/**) which is similar to MP3.com in many ways but differs because there are very few free downloads. eMusic charges a flat fee of 99 cents (American) per track and $8.99 for a full album of tracks. We are assured that the artists get paid at least part of these fees. I noticed that here you could download tracks from slightly more well known artists including, in the jazz section, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis and Charlie Parker. Elvis Costello was one of the big names I spotted in the site's current top 10.

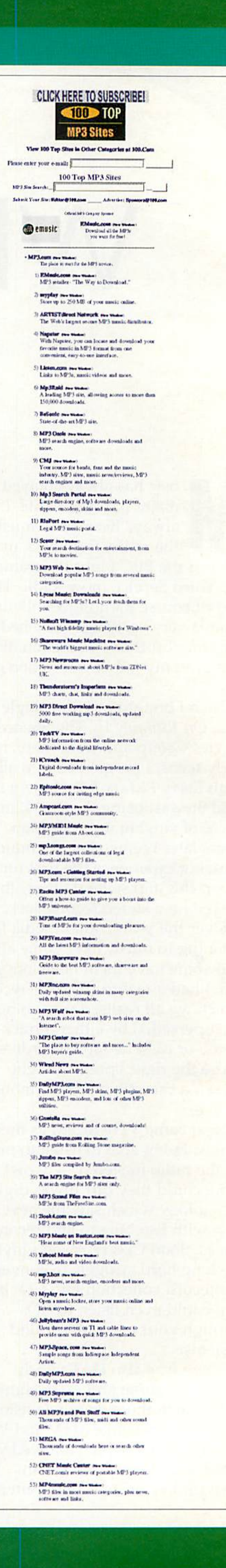
Myplay (**www.myplay.com**) is a site which has been set up specifically for you to store your own MP3 files on the Web. Quite simply you register with myplay.com and in return you get an amazing 3Gb locker in which to store all your music, free, gratis and for nothing. Once registered you can also access other peoples lockers to download what they have stored as well.

This site seems to have found a loophole in that they cannot be held responsible for what their customers store in their lockers so you have access to MP3s of tracks from top artists. Just a quick glimpse and I saw that you could download someone's collection of Madonna tracks. The downside to the site is that it looks like the site was set up specifically for PC or Mac users. I only tried a couple of times but failed to download anyone's MP3 files and kept getting the error message — those with *Oregano* might do better. Having joined though I will be contacting the company to see what needs to be done for Acorn users to gain access to this excellent facility.

One last site worth a look is the excellent 100topMP3sites.com (**www.100topMP3sites.com**) which does exactly as it says on the tin. It is a list of the top 100 MP3 sites with links provided to each and every one of them. Included on there is the notorious Napster which used to be an illegal site but is now 100% legal. I only skimmed the surface so I can't say for sure if all the sites are legal or not but you can have loads of fun visiting the sites and finding out.

Don't go to any of these sites expecting to be able to download the latest from Pink Floyd or Oasis. The artists on most of the sites are nearly all up and coming new stars or newly emerging musicians who have taken the decision to allow music fans to try out their material before buying more. I suppose it is a bit like making a demo tape or disc but missing out the middle man, in this case, the DJs or the record companies. Now you can make your own minds up who will be the stars of the future without having to rely on someone else to decide if you will ever get to hear some excellent material.

END



A little bit of the top 100 MP3 sites

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Overhead views

Andrew Weston examines the other major player in the presentation league

In recent years, the practice of giving presentations has been undergoing a transition, particularly in universities for example, from using established methods of conveying information such as slides and transparent acetates towards electronic presentations with computer controlled graphics projections.

Even without using a PC therefore, is it not surprisingly that one may become familiar with the existence of a very popular software PC package called *Powerpoint*.

Thankfully, RISC OS has become well-catered for in this area over the past few years with at least two major packages aimed at producing high quality presentations to an audience, controlled by your RISC OS machine. One such package is *OHP* and its successor *OHP2* from Photodesk Ltd.

The underlying principle of this kind of software is to allow the user to produce the slides to be presented on the computer and then display them removing the need to prepare any other conventional materials and subsequently automate the transitions between slides and so on.

A notable advantage of presentation software is the facility to add transition and presentation effects such as screen fades and sound effects or commentary. If used effectively, these facilities can give the presentation a much more professional feel. In all these areas, *OHP2* is (at least) adequately equipped and in this review I'll examine the range of features available together with the ease-of-use permitted by the editing approach *OHP2* adopts.

Editing and effects

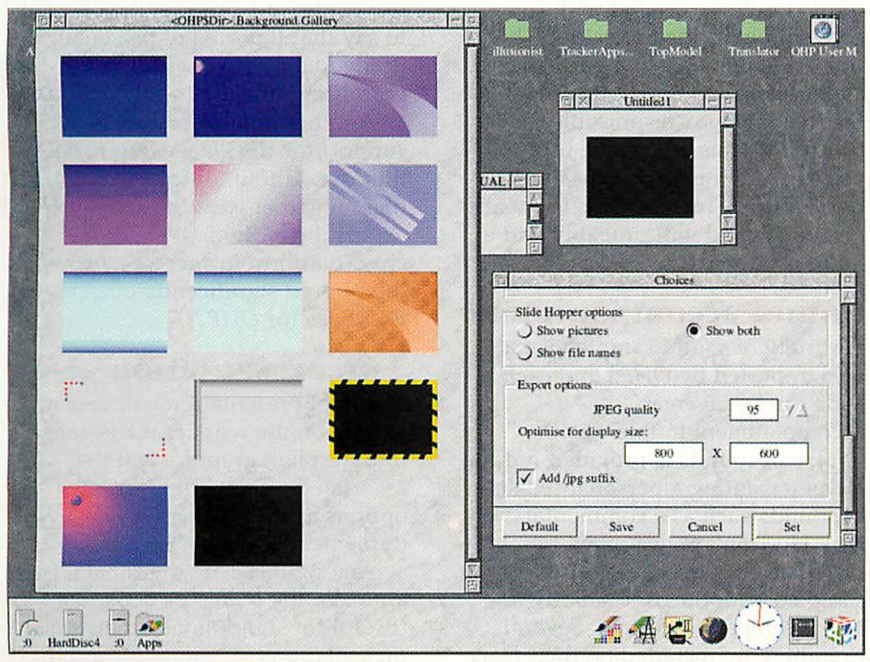
The software aims to make the creative process as smooth as possible from the outset by allowing drag-and-drop operations of your slide images in a way familiar to any RISC OS users and utilising image formats produced by the universally available applications — *Paint* and *Draw*. Indeed, as a great many graphics file formats from other platforms can easily be converted to these RISC OS filetypes with freely available software (like *ChangeFSI*), there's no obstacle to productivity.

The main editing is done in the 'script' window into which graphics files are dragged and from which they can be re-ordered, re-edited (via the original application editor), deleted or even moved to one of any number of other presentation script windows currently being edited (memory permitting). The script window is essentially a pictorial representation of the order of slides.

A comprehensive manual is provided in both HTML and *Easiwriter* format which describes the facilities available for displaying the slides together with accompanying visual and audio effects.

Before moving onto the effects available it is worth noting that in spite of the control that *OHP2* provides, ultimately the major impact of your presentation will be through the graphical quality and content of your slides. For example, consistency in the style and size of the presentation is often less distracting to the viewer and certainly in the case of the latter, if the graphic files are of different sizes, *OHP2* will scale them by varying amounts to fill the screen distorting the text in a similar fashion.

Noticeboard Pro (described last month) scales proportionally while its method of overlaying individual slides on to group-specified



OHP2's gallery of backgrounds, script window and export options

backgrounds means that consistent style is encouraged — this stems from its original design for stand-alone work.

Each *OHP2* slide can be selected and its various attributes, associated sound file and introductory transition effect from the previous slide modified.

A range of backgrounds are provided in the *OHP2* 'gallery' and are in general quite stylish and should be adequate at least for most newcomers to the software for their first few presentations. You are not restricted to the gallery images in any case as you simply have to drag a graphic-file of choice to the script window and select this as the new background graphic.

It should be stated that only one background can be used throughout the presentation (which does enforce style) although you are given the choice of whether an individual slide uses this background image or just shows the preset background colour through any undefined areas. In a Drawfile comprising a few lines of text the background image or colour will be seen around the text.

Individual attributes include whether the slide keeps its proportions or if it is scaled to fit the screen boundaries; whether the slide is automatically shown; whether the slide is hidden and the target time for the slide.

The automation feature can be used quite dramatically as shown by the meteorological demonstrations included with *OHP2*. That is, if slides are set to change into other similar slides in pairs or in a series, simple animations can be implemented potentially greatly improving the delivery of 'spatial' data for example. A specific example is the aforementioned atmospheric movements.

The timings for a slide can be used to control the progress of such animations although, as detailed wisely in the manual, considerations must be made regarding the speed of the RISC OS computer and its likelihood of achieving a desired rate. Timings are also useful in discovering how long your presentation lasts after a trial run for example. The time-values for individual slides on previous runs are calculated cumulatively and individually for later comparison to your estimated 'target' times for a slide.

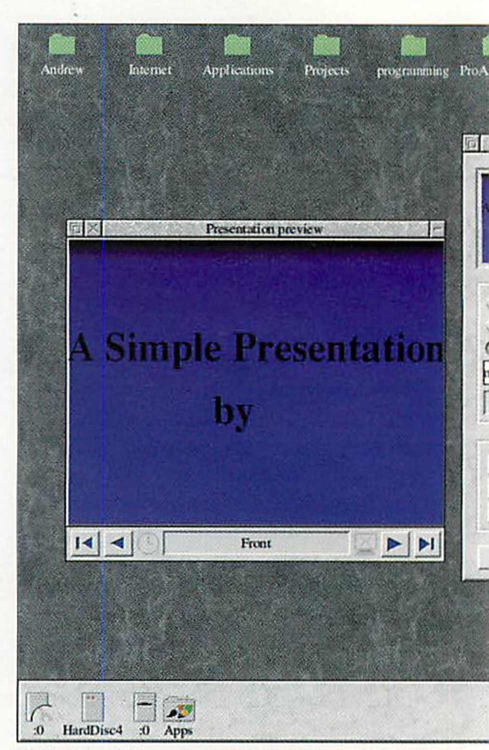
In dealing with such tedious aspects of rehearsal, *OHP2* should allow the speaker to divert more of their efforts into the presentation's content as opposed to manually timing their progress.

Often one of the most immediate contrasts of a computer-driven presentation to a conventional slide-show presentation is the transition between slides. Although, the conventional blank-then-replace effect can still be used it is often far more desirable to use some kind of more fancy effect and *OHP2* is certainly not found wanting in this area.

Transitions are divided into three types — covers, dissolves and wipes, a simple wipe-effect being most closely-associated with conventional slide projectors. The transition on entry to a particular slide can be any one of these and the dialogue box responsible for controlling this allows the user to preview the transition effect using two arbitrary images. This is a really nice touch and will probably add a lot to productivity.

Sound accompaniment

A variety of sound sample formats are supported by *OHP2* and each slide can be given an accompaniment in this way. A library of sounds is provided but for anyone wanting a personalised set of sounds such as a commentary, Rick Hudson's *SoundCon* is provided to convert the sound sampled with the user's hardware into a compatible format. Several examples are included on the CD. A range of control options is provided



The presentation preview window and the sound dialogue box

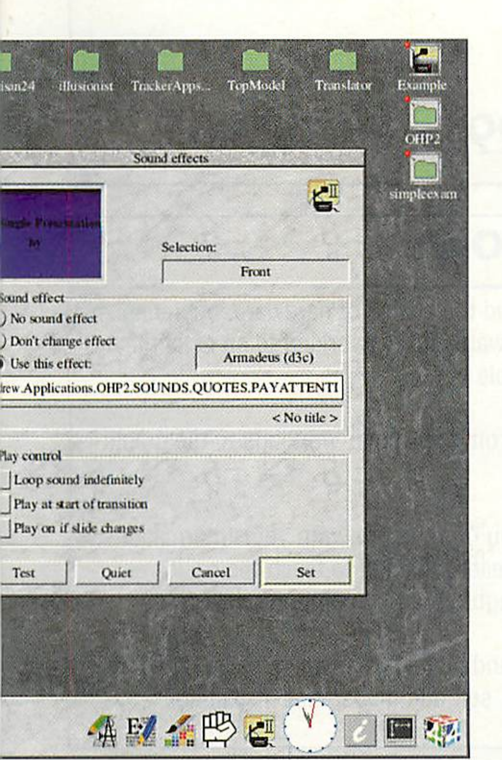
to manage the duration and occurrence of sounds. Thus, if the user has the sounds they want to use ready-and-waiting, then it's fair to say that this area of presentation is adequately-covered for in *OHP2*, permitting music as well of course.

Another notable feature is the support for the PC waveform (WAV) files in addition to Apple AudioIFF files. Together with the ability to export the individual slides into a cross-platform format (see below), this should significantly open up the user base for *OHP2*.

The presentation

The final presentation will depend largely on the work that has gone into the slide graphics and the associated effects but a variety of options are appropriately implemented here.

Among these are the capability to auto-run the whole presentation (useful for stand-alone, unattended presentations for example) and to loop the whole presentation around.



for the first slide

One perhaps less obvious use of the latter is if the presentation speaker wants to avoid reverting to a desktop display on the main overhead screen and thus give the presentation as tidy and professional an impression as possible.

A preview control window is provided for inspection of most aspects of the presentation within the desktop environment together with sounds if desired. You are recommended however to view the presentation in it's full screen version before it's execution however.

Verdict

OHP2 is on the whole a well-featured package which is capable of producing professional-looking presentations. Perhaps to satisfy the most demanding of users there are certain deficiencies, such as the lack of support for movies within slides, although the necessity of information of this nature is debatable. Additionally, certain effects that can be seen on, say, *Powerpoint* presentations cannot easily be achieved here which would be an advantage over the present system in terms of display-capability.

Specifically, these include the slide-on / slide-off of titles often seen in *Powerpoint* displays. Here, presumably one would have to create a series of time-consuming individual, automatically running slides to attain this effect.

For the vast majority of people though, *OHP2* will produce presentations to be proud of and present them with an interface that is stylish and user-friendly with various additional features to add to the power of the presentation. Indeed it is these features which add a great deal of value to the package as a whole.

Assistance is provided at several stages for inexperienced users of the software. In addition to the manual, conveniently, interactive help is supported and also a set of questions and answers pertaining to common problems encountered with the software. One problem is maintaining consistent proportions throughout one's slides and thankfully a template file for *Draw* is provided with pre-tested boundaries to work within.

The slide-hopper is another useful features which deserves a mention. Using this, the speaker can skip slides via a small pane in the corner of the screen during the presentation. As the manual points out, this can be useful to reveal normally hidden slides that were prepared in anticipation of a particularly difficult question from the audience, but otherwise mercifully left alone.

Finally the ability to export (and import) both the graphics and the sound from or to other major platforms increases the usefulness of this package immensely both in terms of convenience for the increasing number of RISC OS users with access to multiple platforms and to those who may require a features or two which another package has.

This makes the software much more attractive to users who may well prefer to construct their presentations at home for presentation later on other hardware if RISC OS machines are not available.

Having said this, *OHP2* can be used as a stand-alone, one-stop package for high-quality presentation production while at the same time, in the current climate, attaining a perhaps essential means of communication with similar packages on other platforms.

A freely distributable viewer program is included on the CD for transport of presentations between RISC OS computers (remembering to collect together all necessary graphic and sound files within a single directory structure when doing this).

The existence of another major presentation package, *Noticeboard Pro*, at the same time as *OHP2* is reminiscent of previous occasions in the often sparse RISC OS software field when two relatively specialised pieces of major software co-exist (who remembers the comparative reviews of *TopModel* and *DaVinci 90*?).

It is to be hoped that this co-existence is beneficial to the development of both packages and that RISC OS users will continue to enjoy the privileged availability of a selection. END

Product details

Product:	OHP2
Price:	£39.95 (Upgrade from v1.x £12.95)
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E-mail:	support@photo-desk.com
Tel:	+44 (0)1305 822753
Fax:	+44 (0)1305 860483

Some other world

Steve Turnbull wastes a lot of valuable time

Am I happy? I certainly am, back in the bad old days of 80's I was kept happy with endless hours of playing *Elite* on the BBC Micro. Eventually this stopped and I went on to more fruitful work helping to edit the old Micro User.

Then came *Star Fighter 3000*. Oh my, what a game, it was just such fun — but it had that serious drawback, it was just too addictive. Eventually I had to delete it and just play the demo — I got so good I could finish the demo in under two minutes.

But time went on and processors changed and suddenly the demo wouldn't work any more so I stopped playing games completely, apart from Angband.

But now, oh dearie me, iSV have done something very, very naughty they've released a CD containing *Elite* and *Star Fighter* (plus *Air Supremacy* and *Sunburst* which I will cover in the next issue). In fact it becomes very difficult to do this review as I find lots of reasons why I need to go back and re-check things in the games...

Star Fighter 3000

This is my favourite, and I was interested to see if anything in particular had been done apart from ensuring it runs properly on the StrongARM and on RISC OS 4.

It has received a little cosmetic upgrade in the intro sequence, two extra screens which have the "iSV and VOTI presents" bits plus — a little flashier titles images. However the classic introduction where you are tuning in to a TV station is the same as is the accompanying music.

SF3000 always did have an unusual back story: you are a contestant in a TV show run by FedNet. In this show you take on combat missions, which initially are fairly run-of-the-mill. But as time goes on you find yourself engaged in battle with other TV stations — in other words you may be a contestant but you are actually fighting against ... other contestants? Weird.

The back story does actually run through the whole set of missions and there are a lot of them. So let's get started on how the game is played.

As a contestant you are equipped with a combat air/space craft. The missions are in three sets: Easy, medium and hard. At each level there are 36 missions, so you have a lot to get through. The missions themselves are structured in a pyramidic form, you start at the corner of one, having completed that you can chose between one or other of the two above it. When that's done you can go to one of the two above that and so on.

There's a full password system so you can backtrack to an earlier mission and then take an alternative route up to the top. Ultimately completing all the missions at that level of difficulty.

You get an initial fund of cash with which to equip your ship and then read up on the mission notes, check out the map, your start position and so on, then start.

I personally prefer keyboard handling of the ship, although there are







the full set of options, and on my StrongARM machine I felt the need to set the game speed at the slowest — maybe I'm getting old but even at the next setting up ship movement was barely controllable. I didn't try any higher speed option.

As a quick hint for beginners: The first mission is a "get used to how to play" where nothing shoots back and you have all the time you need. Take this opportunity to shoot everything in sight and pick up every power-up token you can get. This is the time to get your machine equipped to take on the higher levels when you have far less time to spend collecting tokens.

There are several types of token: Points ranging from 3, 10, 20 and 50 — I saw 100's on the demo (I think) but not playing the full game recently. Then there are the direct power-ups which consist only of anti-aircraft missiles, air-to-ground missiles and additional lives. On some levels you will also get the special weapons, such as high blast bombs (as opposed to missiles).

The other way of getting points and power-ups are the parachute drops, you will be alerted to the drop on screen and the map screen will show you where the parachute is descending. If you get to it fast enough and "catch" it you will get a random bonus which can include shield boosts, weapon strength increase and so on.

The missions have quite a variety which shows the forethought that went into the game design. At the simplest every mission amounts to "destroy these targets", but there are plenty of wrinkles: Some missions are in space; others on radically unusual planets; some give you friendly ships in support; at least one mission involves a ship that doesn't appear on radar; enemy ships have varying levels "intelligence".

Some missions require a certain result to be completed while others have a time limit either in terms of a ticking clock, but others finish when the enemy achieve their aim. Another nice touch is that enemy ships don't consider you to be the only target, other friendly ships will come under attack and will dogfight quite happily without you there. In some missions there are rival TV stations slogging it out with each other when you arrive.

And along with this is the variety of objects you can encounter, different types of buildings, alien buildings, ships, submarines (on the surface), space stations, satellite gun emplacements; cargo ships; in fact the only disappointment (in a way) is that there are no mobile land or sea vehicles unlike Clares' *Interdictor* games. At the time the program was written this may have been too taxing for the processor but now we have oodles of power to spare. Shame.



This is one game where the programmers were very very thorough and one of the other areas they approached was that of views: You can watch the game from a multitude of viewpoints.

The standard is the 1st person "behind the head" (or rather, ship) view, so you see your ship hanging in space in front of you. You can also take the 1st person "in the ship" view; you can rotate your field of view or switch front to back with a single key. You can utilise the fixed camera view which places imaginary cameras at fixed grid points and they follow the ship as it flies. You can view from any of the friendly ships in the game, or take a missile-eye view when it launches.

All these options can get confusing so there is a single key to



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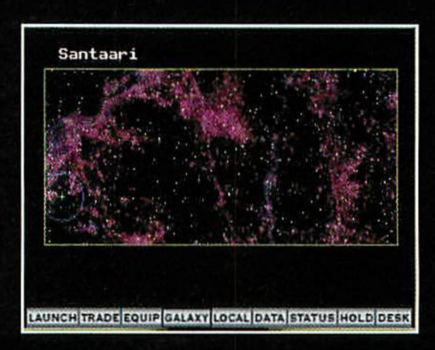
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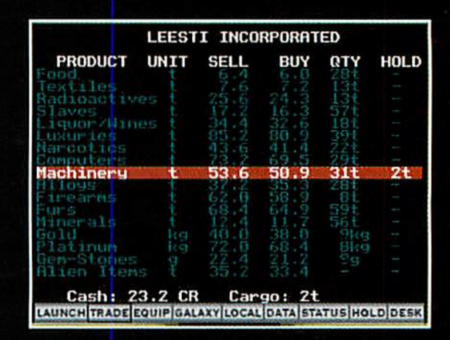
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return you to the original view. These options do have limited value and it's nice to have them but the urgency of the moment means that you will almost certainly stick to the main view most of the time.

Back on the game play itself, between each level you have the opportunity to re-equip your ship — in fact you *can* do it mid-game if you return and dock with the mothership. Another advantage of this is that you rebuild your shields more quickly if things have got particularly hot, but the disadvantage is that enemy ships will attack the mothership and if you lose that you usually lose completely; regardless of the number of lives you have remaining, the game is over.

Also between levels you can get the one-armed bandit. This can give you various bonuses including the "bonus level", which means that when a mission is complete the sky becomes peppered with parachute drops and you can rush around picking up extras. Unfortunately this can also reduce your armament which is very very not nice. I'd be happier without this particular feature.

So there you have it, *Star Fighter 3000*, it's a great game. For me it balances speed of play and difficulty level perfectly so, now that I've finished this review I shall have to delete it and make the CD unaccessible in some way — but I'll keep it handy just in case I get some free time.

Elite

What can you say about *Elite* that hasn't been said a thousand times before? It was the first, it was the best and Acorn was the machine that had the original implementation. Of course this version isn't the original, this is the Burch/Gringrass ARM conversion which was a faithful copy with some limited enhancements as permitted by the original author, Ian Bell.

This is the free version now available on Ian Bell's Web site but code has been added to modify it (once loaded) to run on StrongARM/RISC OS 4. Having wasted many an hour on *Elite* in the dim and distant I was keen to get to grips with this version.

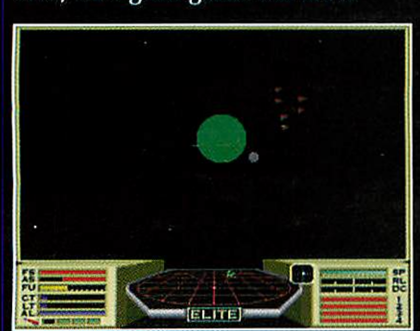
Elite is the definitive space trading game, what you do is travel from world to world trading goods and generating cash while building up your cash and your Cobra Mk III spaceship. You have a rating which starts at Harmless and works its way up to Elite, depending on the number of pirates you've blown out of the sky.

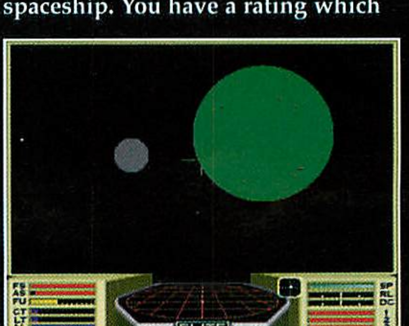
In the game there are eight galaxies and in each galaxy there are hundreds of star systems, each one has a sun and a planet, and around each planet is a space station and sometimes a moon. Every planet has its own tech level, political structure and level of lawfulness which affect the prices of goods and the number of pirates you're likely to find.

The planetary and system characteristics and the planet's name are based around the location of the system in the galaxy so all the individual information does not have to be stored, only the coordinates — which is why this huge game could be fitted (originally) into a 32K BBC Micro.

Play starts on the planet Lave, which is fairly poor and agricultural. So you spend your 10 credits buying 17 tons of food and try to ship it to the nearby system of Leesti which is also poor but its got a bit more technology. You sell the food, and make a profit, then buy in computers and ship them back to Lave. Then you do it again. And again. And again.

Bored? You won't be because

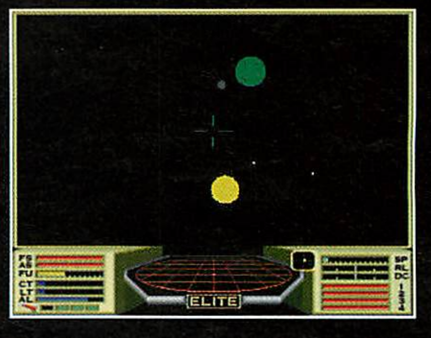












unfortunately it's not that easy. First there's docking and then there are pirates. You have to master the docking procedure, so that you can arrive in the space station and deposit your cargo.

Every space station has a docking tunnel facing inwards towards the planet — imagine a line running from the centre of the space station to the centre of the planet and get your ship on it. However there's another problem, the space station is rotating and you have to match that as well.

Theoretically if you cn get yourself on that imaginary line then the rotating bit is not hard. But if you aren't on that line properly then the moment you start to rotate things go horribly wrong. I did manage it again after all these years so I can be smug.

Pirates are the other main problem: You can hyperspace over to another system as soon as you've exited a space station but arrival accuracy leaves a lot to be desired. You usually arrive a very long way from the planet. Your radar screen shows the planet's direction so line yourself up and start powering towards it.

The RISC OS version added a little extra to speed up this part: the short range jump. This works lovely unless there is some heavy mass in the locality, in which case it doesn't. Unfortunately the type of mass you're most likely to encounter is another ship, or many ships. And they're usually not friendly.

At the start you're not ging to be any great shakes at flying, not only are you inexperienced but your ship is not well-equipped with killing stuff — it's very expensive. There are many upgrades you can buy to the lasers (pointing in all directions) you can have four missiles and also ECM. But it's the good lasers you really need.

If you're lucky you'll go speeding by a space battle that's already in progress and not get involved or it'll be some cargo vessel big or small, sometimes it'll be a squadron of police ships (flying in formation), convenient if they're going your way but mostly they aren't.

But so it goes, you build up in strength and status and when your status reaches a certain point missions get triggered, there aren't a lot of them but they add interest.

Naturally you have to fuel your ship, this costs at the space station but you can avoid it by getting fuel scoops and flying into the sun (remember the Sunprobe episode of Thunderbirds? It's just like that.)

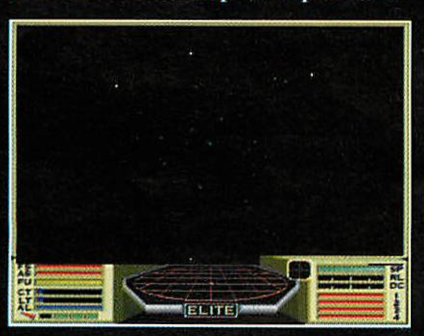
If you don't like ordinary trading you can become a asteroid miner instead, though you'll need a special mining laser — I had mine mounted on the left of the ship so as not to get in the way of real fighting. Though in this case you have to watch out for Rock Hermits who live in some asteroids.

Also you must be careful you don't get caught by the thargoids — it's usually lethal. This alien will yank you out of hyperspace and swarms of them will attck, it's important to take out the mothership if you can then the drones can be picked up as alien items which are worth a pretty penny. However if you're out of hyperjump fuel, getting caught somewhere between stars is very inconvenient. You end up having to use the short distance jump for a very long time to get to the nearest star system.

And that's Elite, nowadays I don't have the time to invest in a game of this type, but it still holds up with an excellent balance of playability and not too much time between planets.

Just make sure you practice that docking before trying to play seriously. END





Product details

Product:	Other Worlds
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Hot connections

Richard Goodwin let's you in on what DialUp can do

When it was first released *DialUp* was the fledgling contender up against a long-established piece of Internet software, the *ANT Suite*. But almost immediately, with the announcements from ArgoNet it became elevated to possible replacement, and made some comparisons between them a little academic. However, some of them will no doubt still stand so long as people are still using the ANT Suite.

DialUp, as the name suggests, is basically an Internet dialler, it handles the connection to your ISP, and then you can use other software such as a Web browser to do something more interesting. Although you do get some other software included in the price of the basic package — more of which later — you can also opt to buy *DialUp* along with R-Comp's other Internet software (the *WebsterXL* Web browser and *Messenger Pro* e-mail and news client) for a discounted price.

The basic price of £20 will get you just the dialler software and accompaniments; *Messenger Pro* owners can get it for £15, and *WebsterXL* owners just £10. Buy all of the above together and you have a pretty full Internet suite for £60, which compares favourably with ANT's £100 — although it's not within the brief of this review to argue the merits of *WebsterXL* over *Fresco*, or *Messenger Pro* over *Marcel*.

Setting up

Although die-hard RISC OS fans might deride Windows on a regular basis but by a law of averages it spawns the occasional good idea. Many ISPs provide something called an INS file which can automatically set up the Windows Internet software to use your account with that ISP.

Not to be outdone, these files form the heart of the DialUp configuration. Given that pretty much every ISP provides these files (including RISC OS stalwarts ArgoNet), it makes a lot of sense to take advantage of this and have RISC OS software that is compatible with an accepted standard.

The best way to get these is to go online and download one from one of those (semi-)free ISPs, which if you're starting from scratch will require the use of a machine "borrowed" from a friend, employer or educator to register and bring the INS file back on a floppy, but there are a number of half-completed scripts available so that you can configure an existing account with minimal input.

Currently these are very UK-centric, the only other country represented in the scripts folder being a single file for Denmark, something which I'm sure our other friends from overseas will want updating in future versions, or indeed may be able to contribute to. If you are registering an account via non-online methods though, whatever country you're in it makes sense to ask for an INS file with all of your details pre-configured to be sent on floppy along with any paper details.

Public domain

I mentioned some of the other software that came with the program; these include mail and news transports, an FTP client and a simple command line telnet program. If you've accessed the Internet using RISC OS machines before then no doubt you'll be very familiar already with *PopStar*, *NewsHound* and *FTPc*.

These have been in use for ages, and are firm favourites with the PD community. *PopStar* and *NewsHound* enable you to fetch your news and e-mail automatically when you dial-up, even if you can't actually access anything without getting another piece of software. Because they're so standard you won't have a problem finding something compatible, either from R-Comp or other sources, and they're established enough to be stable. *FTPc* is an excellent FTP program which I have been using for some time now, and can heartily recommend.

I must admit to being a little wary about commercial companies taking on PD software, which seems to be happening more often of late; a previously fragile PD scene has just started to look a little healthier with the PD libraries of old slowly being replaced by Web sites such as AcornSearch (**www.acornsearch.com**), but I'd hate to see commercial interests causing this to falter.

Other packages

Having mentioned *Voyager* in passing, it's obvious that it's ArgoNet's software that *DialUp* resembles the most. Not only does it act in a similar way to *Voyager*, it looks quite like it too. There's a long window with a number of large icons which, when clicked on, will load your Web browser, e-mail client and so on.

There's an online time count on there; a connect/disconnect button, although connection is easier if you just left-click on the iconbar icon, and right-click to disconnect; You can quickfetch your mail and news; You can even add your own icons to load your favourite programs. Even the

Internet Apps - Offline
Web Browser
Read Mail
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File Transfer

whole concept of an Internet program aimed at people who want it to work without having to bother with any of the technical stuff puts *DialUp* on *Voyager*'s turf, although R-Comp might say otherwise.

Voyager is technically cheaper, given that you pay £25 to get online with ArgoNet and get three month's access which is usually £10 ex VAT a month, effectively they're giving you a fiver to take it off their hands and comes with software that *DialUp* doesn't have by default — Web browser, e-mail client, newsgroup client, telnet client.

There is though one huge difference however: Voyager only works for ArgoNet subscribers. It's locked into their service, and so can be subsidised by the monthly dues. *Voyager* also comes with relatively crude mail and news clients, and although the *Fresco* browser is generally considered better than R-Comp's *Webster XL* — faster, certainly — updates are not as often forthcoming, and may indeed have dried up altogether now.

This brings us to other main contender for your Internet suite budget, the *ANT Suite* itself, which also contains all you need to get going — e-mail, news, the same *Fresco* browser, plus many smaller utilities — but weighs in at around £100, which is more expensive than putting together all the R-Comp products in one go, and that's if you can still get hold of it. I personally have a number of issues with ANT's mail reader too, so *Messenger Pro* might be a better buy for the inexperienced user anyway. The ANT Suite was the major Internet suite for RISC OS, but without updates and a new distributor this may be pretty hard to get hold of in future.

One big plus point that *DialUp* has over the alternatives is its ability to use multiple accounts. After setting up my existing ArgoNet account to test the software, I decided to give it a more thorough going over and sign up for one of those free ISPs (FreeUK). Both accounts sat side by side, and when my ArgoNet account gave me a busy signal it was a simple matter to switch over to the alternative. There's software around to get the *ANT Suite* to use multiple accounts, but it's not as simple and needs to be hunted down and downloaded; *Voyager* has never had this ability, and probably never will.

Final thoughts

Overall though I found the package to be quite robust — although the first version crashed when I tried to set it up, by the new edition I was able to maintain longer connections than on Voyager using my rather flaky 'phone line, although I wasn't using the same ISP so it may not be a fair comparison.

I had been trying to upload a large number of photographs taken with my digital camera to my Web site, and Voyager with *FTPc* died after half an hour — to the point that *FTPc* crashed horribly. *DialUp* allowed me to upload for 11 hours before the connection stopped, at which point *DialUp* simply popped up a box informing me that traffic had ceased and would I like to disconnect? Although this particular test was a little extreme, it's not an isolated incident and I'm starting to use *DialUp* as a first choice now.

The original version had a few niggles that would have stopped a few setups working, but thankfully these areas have been worked on and the newer version comes with a plethora of options if you are of a technical bent, the modem options for instance going on to a second "advanced" window so that the number of choices doesn't confuse the novice.

Full block driver support is now in place so that users of serial cards can select from the full range, not just the internal serial port; not only can you switch off the annoying modem whine when it first connects, but if your modem supports it you can even set the volume with a slider. It was originally stated as working on Risc PCs and later machines (A7000 series, RiscStations and so on), but you should now be able to use older machines — although personally I wouldn't recommend using a 4MB A310 for anyone's browsing pleasure, it should be just about possible.

One minor point that I'd like to see worked on is customisation — the ability to add themes or skins to the icons, which I think are a little bland even though they use more colours than the usual *Voyager* stuff. It's a feature that was added to *Voyager* by popular demand, and even the ANT Suite can have sound support bolted on, so I can see the same being asked of *DialUp*.

But maybe I'm just biased — I wrote the sound themes support for *Voyager* and host most of the sound and graphics themes on my Web site. Seems a shame to be able to skin *Webster XL* or *Oregano* but not the dialler.

Summing up

For the price — as little as ten pounds if bought in combination — *DialUp* is a robust piece of software that is easy to configure for the novice, but now comes with enough options to please the more advanced user. If you already have an Internet suite that you're completely happy with then there may not be a huge incentive to make the change, but, especially given the lack of any real alternative, it looks like R-Comp will be the first port of call for newbie Internet users in the future. **END**

Product details

Product:	DialUp (and support software)
Price:	£30 alone; £20 with Messenger Pro; £10 with Webster XL; £60 for whole package
Supplier:	R-Comp, 22 Robert Moffat, High Legh, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6PS
Tel:	(+44/0) 1925 755043
Fax:	(+44/0) 1925 757377
E-mail:	rcomp@rcomp.co.uk
Web:	www.rcomp.co.uk

Master of th

John Cartmell finds out how to download big files without pain

There are two sorts of people who are connected to the Internet: those who pay for their connection by the minute and those who don't. Whichever sort you happen to be you will share a number of common needs in a program designed to download files but a critical requirement is rarely implemented.

For those paying by the minute a very large file that is cut-off after 90% has loaded can represent an expensive failure. Even those of us paying a fixed price for connection have reason to be wary of long downloads, especially if the modem line is shared with a voice telephone link.

Wouldn't it be an excellent idea if you could simply restart a download from where it left off after a disconnection? As the Internet gets busier and the files that you want to download get larger, disconnection in the middle of a download becomes more likely.

WSS have come up with *LoadMaster* which seems to solve this major download difficulty. Not only will the program allow downloading to be resumed after an external break but you can also pause the download. The latter might be to allow your daughter to use the telephone to make her arrangements to go out clubbing for the night, or to cease your Internet access before 8:00am and the start of expensive online time.

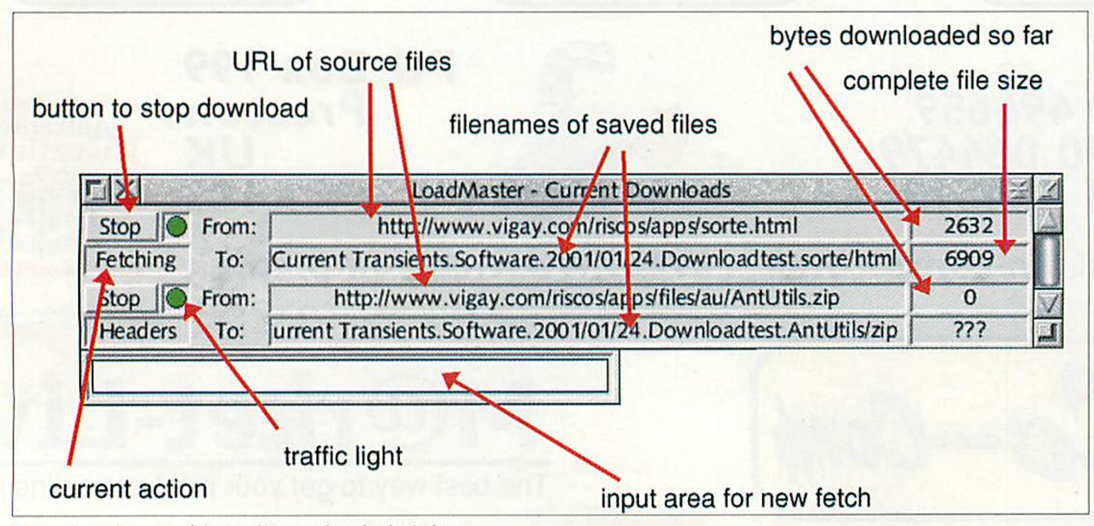
LoadMaster is a simple, small program that is a delight to use. It enables you to queue a list of files you want downloaded and will collect them for you one at a time. If you want you can stop an individual download and start another or instruct it to download more than one at a time — all by simple mouse-clicks.

The download status of each file in the list is indicated by traffic-light indicators; amber indicating 'ready to go', green 'downloading' and red if the download has stopped. If a download has been stopped and you re-connect to the 'Net later the indicators will automatically move to amber ready to re-commence downloading. All this happens in the background allowing you to complete other tasks. The one thing that ensures that any application continues to be used is the way it makes itself easy to use. *LoadMaster* is installed by simply coping it on to the harddrive and a file is included with it to optionally enable *LoadMaster* to start every time the machine is run. The instructions, included as a text file, are clear and soon become second nature.

LoadMaster accepts input of a file name by typing in the file address. To make life simple the **http://www.** and **ftp://ftp.** prefixes are generated by pressing the up and down keys. Also available in the same way are the last ten addresses loaded. This allows easy access to a range of related files by simply amending each address in turn.

In most cases the address needn't be typed in at all. If, for example you encounter a URL in a *Fresco*, *Oregano*, *Browse* or *WebsterXL* Web page you can transfer the link directly to *LoadMaster*. Although not (yet) mentioned in the manual it is possible to do the same from *Pluto* by clicking Menu over the URL in the *Pluto* article viewer, choosing 'Save as' and dragging the save icon into the *LoadMaster* input area. The whole interface is simple and soon becomes an easy and very natural way of working.

To keep you informed, the *LoadMaster* window indicates the URL of the source file, and the filename



The various elements of the LoadMaster download window

e download

it's being saved as, together with the bytes downloaded and the size of the complete file.

It's clear that *LoadMaster* is at its best when used side by side with a web browser. Files for downloading can easily be added as you browse through pages leaving *LoadMaster* working away in the background as you explore new pages. If the browser dies on a bad page *LoadMaster* continues; if the whole machine dies *LoadMaster* will remember where it was and will continue from the break point once restarted. Some pages can cause problems because they hide the URLs of files on offer but these can be added to *Loadmaster* manually after looking at the Web page HTML directly.

LoadMaster's strengths are its ease of use and its solution for the dropped connection problem. If you already have a partial download on your harddrive this can be added to the save box (drag and drop) and the new download starts from where the original ended. End of problem.

The authors, Paul Gardiner and Robin Watts, are clearly interested in talking to authors of complementary programs to ensure that interaction between programs remains as a smooth as possible. The program works. It worked for me over a period of weeks without complaint. For a utility that's exactly what is needed. It looks like *LoadMaster* will be in daily use here, and on many other RISC OS machines, for some time to come. END

Product details

Product:	LoadMaster
Price:	£20 + VAT
Supplier:	Warm Silence Software, PO Box 28, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, OX20 1XX
Tel:	01608 737172
Mobile:	07885 487642
E-mail:	info@wss.co.uk
Web:	www.wss.co.uk

Here is the news

Martin Hodgson gets you better connected

Now that we are on line, browsing the Web, we should look at how you get yourself set up to access both the newsgroups and e-mail.

We already have all the little bits and pieces required to get connected to the Internet, and have set up an account with an ISP (Internet Service Provider), assuming all went well in accord with my previous article. We now need a News Fetcher to go out and collect the news we request.

Newshound is one such, it is free and well thought of. Make sure you get the latest version, v.1.4 which went onto Joseph Heenan's Web site mid October 2000. Do not try to use any older version.

You will find version 1.39 on the *Oregano* CD, and also hidden inside *DialUp* (the version I got). Do not use it. It caused me endless grief even though, as I now know, I had it configured 'correctly'. It simply gave endless "cannot resolve newsserver hostname" errors. Some people seem to have got it to work, but I simply could not on my machine. The new version uses the Acorn/ANT Resolver (which you have inside *Boot*) instead of its own. In stark contrast this version works like a dream.

While you are on, also get a Mail Fetcher. *Popstar* is the one I used. Version 2.02b is the latest at the time of writing. Get it now because some of the configuration for news fetching also involves mail fetching. These Fetchers send, as well as fetching, news and mail for you.

Now whatever information the Fetchers fetch (and send), they need to store it somewhere. That is why you need *Newsbase*. I used version 0.60m available free off the Web — like everything else.

Finally, to actually read what has been fetched, you need a Reader. *Messenger* is free, so get that off the Web. There are also *Messenger Pro* and *Pluto 2*, the fully fledged commercial readers, which you might want to use later for their advanced features. But for now I reckon the free *Messenger* will do nicely.

You will be relieved to know that is the last of the software you will need. Incidentally, if you think all this looks complex compared to other computers, such as Wintel PCs, you would be wrong. A PC has a DUN (dialler) which functions just like *Socketeer*. If you want to set up an ISP manually the procedure is the same.

However, if you just bung the ISP's CD into the PC drive and run it, the dialler is set up automatically, like *DialUp* does on your Acorn. In the PC this usually resets all manner of things you would prefer to be left alone. I do admit though that with *Outlook Express*, the mail and news fetchers, storage, and reader are bundled together, and therefore rather less intimidating. To summarise: connect to the Internet, go to **www.riscos.org** and follow the links to download *Newshound*, *Popstar*, *Newsbase* and *Messenger* from their respective authors' sites. Copy them all into your Internet directory.

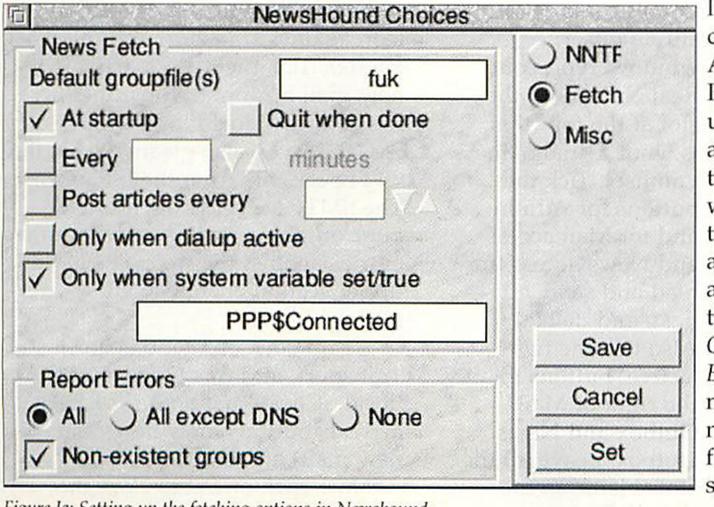


Figure Ia: Setting up the fetching options in Newshound

Setting up

When you first run *Newsbase* it will come up with a Save window. Drag this into the Internet directory, where something called *!Newsdir* will be created. This is where all your news and mail will be stored.

When you first run *Newshound* it will ask you for a News Hostname and Nickname.

What this means is, look down the OFFL/INS file you used before when setting up *Socketeer*, and find the entry NNTP_Server=. That gives something like news.freeuk.net. Enter that as the Hostname. The nick, or nickname, is a three letter identifier for your benefit so you know which is which (you can add more ISPs later if you really must). For FreeUK I use *fuk*, but it can be any three letter combination.

Now, with *Newshound* loaded, click Menu on the iconbar icon and select *Configure*. Click on the Fetch radio icon, and click the button for "Only when system variable set/true" so it is ticked (Figure Ia). Also tick the button for "Fetch At Startup". Leave "Quit when done" for now — we may need to do some trouble-shooting later so we want *Newshound* to stay loaded. Then click on Save to save these settings. Note that against "Default groupfile(s)" you should see the Nickname you used for the NNTP_Server (*fuk* in this example). If not, then make it so by typing it in. Incidentally, all that is meant by NNTP Server is the name used to

locate the News server. Now click on the Misc radio icon (Figure Ib). Ensure you have ticked the buttons for Enable newsgroup list fetching and Open status window at start of fetch. At the bottom, tick Get list of all newsgroups, and Fetch newsgroups descriptions. Click on Save.

Now, just for interest, click Menu on the Newshound iconbar icon and select Servers... It opens the directory containing your news server files. One of those, *demGroup*, is set up by the software author and shows how the file should look, with a few comp.sys.acorn newsgroups subscribed from the ISP 'Demon'. Load it into Edit for examination.

Very useful for sorting problems if they occur, but do not modify these files without taking a backup copy. Especially do not mess with the number after NEWSGROUPS. You can however manually add or delete newsgroups. You can also change the default Group file by changing the three letter nickname in Newshound's Configuration window shown above.

Transports

Inside both the *Newshound* and *Popstar* archives, as they come from the Web site, is an application called *InstTrans*. Click on both of them, to install their transports into *Newsdir*. The transports are a set of standard routines used by *Newsbase* to talk to the fetchers.

Load *Newsbase* again, click your Menu (middle) mouse button on the icon. Select Setup. The *Newsbase* Control Panel will appear. This has eight options. Clicking any of these opens up a setup window. Fortunately we do not need all of them.

Newsbase supports the *Help* application, so do load that to get very helpful messages.

From the control panel select Hostname setup: In the Domain space type in the Domain name you used when setting up Socketeer (and which you found from your ISP's OFFL/INS file. For example: **freeuk.com**). Leave the rest — *Newsbase* can handle all manner of complex arrangements for people on networks and machines which are "hot desked". We are not. So just click on the Set button.

Select Local users: Click on Add in the Local user management window to open a small window into which you type your User Name. This is the name you chose for yourself when you set up your account with your ISP, and is the first part (before the @) of your e-mail address. Then click on OK.

Back in the Local user management window use the up/down arrows to have you shown in the User slot, and click on Edit. In the Modifying user: window, type your Real Name into the slot at the top (that is, your actual name you use). Tick the buttons for Admin, and for Mail access and News access (for read and send / post, and delete) Also tick the two 'active' buttons to the right of Mail Outbox and News Outbox. Leave all the slots blank, so the default Outboxes are used. Click on Set, then on Save back in the Local user management window.

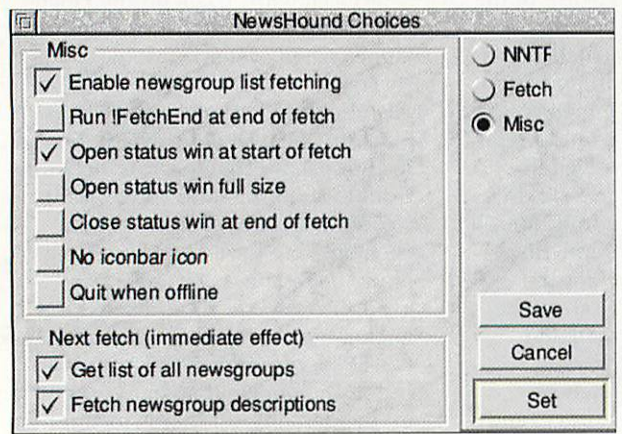


Figure Ib: Setting up how Newshound behaves when run

Select Transport setup (Figure IIa): Before doing anything else, did you first set up the *Newsdir* directory from *Newshound*, then run the two *InstTrans* applications which came with *Newshound* and *Popstar* to install the transports? If not, do it now. You probably will need to reload *Newsbase* in this event, and get back to where you were.

In the Transport setup window, in the upper one third of it, click on the menu icon to the right of Source transport. From the pop-up menu select *Newshound*. Similarly, for Default mail route select *Popstar*, and for the Default news route select *Newshound* again.

Still in the Transport setup window, halfway down is the Transport entry, with a menu icon to the right of it. Click on that and select *Newshound*. The rest of this section changes a little to reflect the fact you are now dealing with the news setup.

Tick the 'Check arrivals, new news' button. In the lower of the Gateway slots (the news one) enter the name of your NNTP_server (News server), from the OFFL/INS file supplied by your ISP (which we also used for Newshound).

Now click again on the menu icon against Transport and select *Popstar*. Tick the 'Check arrivals, new mail button. In the upper of the gateway slots type in your SMTP_server, also gleaned from the OFFL/INS file from the ISP's CD. The SMTP server is the route for your outgoing mail. Notice that the entries against the two via's in the upper section change to show your settings.

Again click on menu against Transport, and this time select 'local'. Check that both the Check arrivals buttons (new news and new mail) are ticked.

Now click on Set to close the Transport setup window. Back in

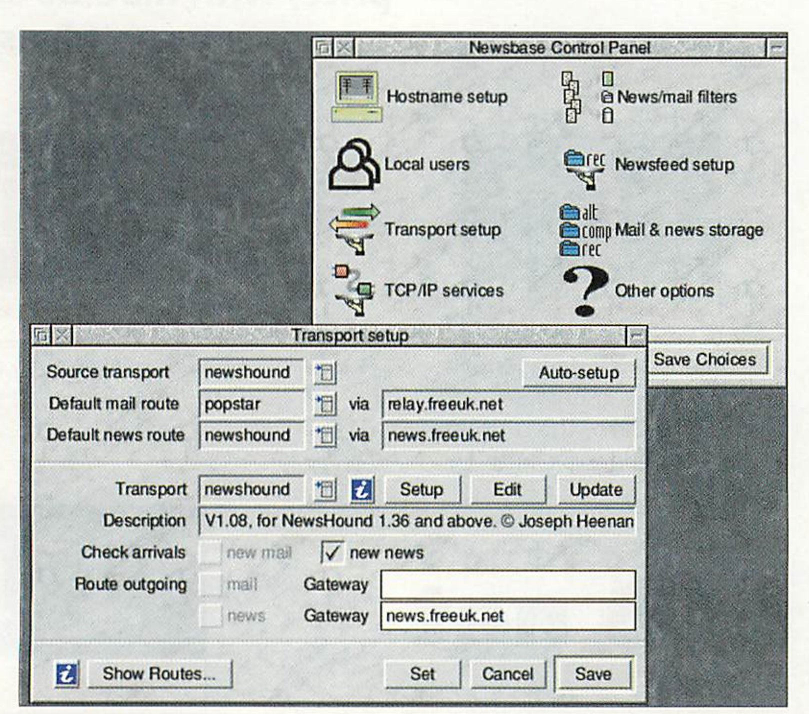


Figure IIa: Newsbase needs to know which transports it should use for each type of fetch

the Newsbase Control panel, select TCP/IP services. Tick (click on) all four buttons next to Autostart, then on Set.

As a point of interest the Ports which are being listened to are Virtual Ports, of which all computers have thousands. HTTP (Web pages) are conventionally on port 80, and NNTP (news), POP3 (e-mail in), SMTP (e-mail out) are as shown in this panel.

Finally from the Newsbase Control Panel, select Other options (Figure IIb). In the top half of the Other options window tick Auto process new: for both mail and news, and Announce new: for mail & news, also on Keep logfile.

Click on the menu icons to the right of both Default Mail Reader and default News Reader, and select Messenger in both cases. Note this detects the full path to find Messenger. Therefore do not at any later date change any directories or their names. Finally click on Save.

In the main Newsbase Control Panel click on Save to ensure everything is really saved and close the window. Incidentally, we have ignored three of the setup areas in the Control Panel. These are used for setting such things as the length of time after which news and mail items will be automatically deleted, and network and multiuser options.

You can apparently add and delete Newsgroups here but it hasn't worked for me. The relevant file 'groups' is to be found inside **!Newsdir.newsbase.config.NewsHound**, and can be edited by hand in *Edit*. You can also edit the Group file by hand in *Newshound* if you menu on the iconbar and select Servers..., and load the relevant 'xxxGroup' file into *Edit*. That seems to be the important one.

Setting up Messenger

Load *Messenger* to the iconbar, click menu over it and select Choices... which brings up another panel full of intimidating things to set — but we can ignore all of it. Come back later (like, in a few weeks) if you want to do things such as change the cosmetics of your news pages.

However I suggest you do click on Server choices in the top left corner. Tick on Start server automatically, then on Set, then on Save choices. This makes *Messenger* load *Newsbase* automatically. Since one without the other is not a lot of use, you may as well select this option.

The end

Believe it or not that really is the end of all the setting up. All you have to do then is actually run the thing.

Which should be just what you do, but things happen, about which it is a Very Good Idea to have some knowledge and that can come in the very next article. END

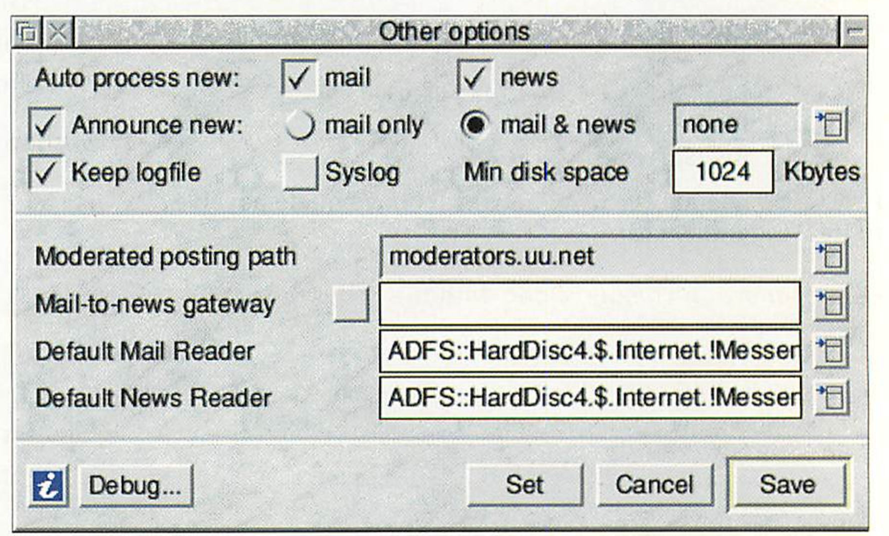


Figure IIb: Configuring Newsbase for its behaviour when fetching e-mail and news

What's it all

Mike Cook goes into some detail about the bus coming to our stop soon

I have mentioned the USB in a past Rambles column but the editor thought you might like to know a little more about it seeing it is soon to make an appearance on the Omega. Looking at some of the comments about USB I have read on Acorn Web sites there seems to be a bit of confusion out there as to what it is, what it offers and it's usefulness in the RISC OS world.

First off, it stands for Universal Serial Bus, which is strange really because it is not actually a bus at all. A true bus has the same electrical signal going from point to point to many devices, like the SCSI bus, the IEEE488 bus or even the humble I2C bus. But when you have a bus you have the problem that there can only be one device talking at any one time and on most busses there is a danger of a "collision" when more than one devices tries to drive it at the same time.

The USB gets past this problem by not being a bus at all, all communication is wired point to point between a master and a slave. The clever part is that it can be made to appear to the user just like a bus by the use of intermediate devices called hubs, these take streams of communication and switch them to one and only one device at a time.

Of course that device might be another hub which directs it to another and so on, up to five hubs deep, with a maximum of 127 devices. In this way it looks like a bus because you simply add a new device onto a spare socket and when you run out of sockets you simply go and buy another hub.

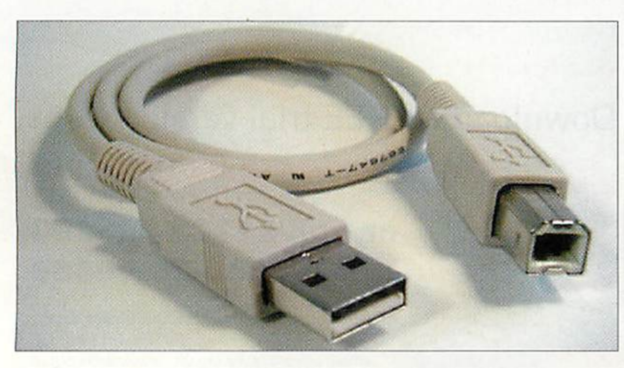
The beginning

Let's start at the beginning, there is only one master, which is your computer, and this is called a host. The host does all the talking and commands the slaves, the peripheral devices, to accept data or send back a package.

Slaves don't speak unless spoken to, and then they are told exactly how much data to send back. The exciting thing is that these devices can be virtually anything that requires slow to medium data transfer speeds. Nowadays, "medium" data speeds mean live video images, digitised sound and even mass storage media like DVD, CD and hard disc.

The other great news is that USB devices are hot pluggable, that means they can be attached and removed without having to shut the system down. If I want to change a SCSI device I have to shut down the computer, turn all the other SCSI devices off, attach or remove the required device, turn them all on and then reboot the computer.

Messy though it is, it's not so time-consuming with a Risc PC but try doing that with a PC (providing you can get it to shut down that is), or a Macintosh. You are into serious tea drinking time. The USB allows the hot pluggable trick by the simple expediency of having the power connectors in the plugs longer than the signal connectors so that when you plug them in the power and earth are always established before the signals and so the signals aren't fried.



There are two types of connector on the USB, the first is a down-stream port, these are long and thin and have host data flowing out of them towards the peripherals. The second is the up-stream port, these are roughly square and connect up towards the host. A USB cable will typically have one type of connector on each end although some devices like a mouse will only have one connector on a flying lead.

The other great thing about the USB is that it can supply power to your peripherals so some devices do not need an additional power supply. Each device can have up to 100mA of current but by special negotiation it can get up to 500mA to power it. Many drives and input devices are bus-powered like this. It also shuts down power to devices currently not being used so only active devices are consuming power.

The USB can operate at two speeds, full speed at 12Mbyte/second and slow speed at 1.5Mbyte/second. However, there is an overhead to be taken into account as data is split up into packets, with acknowledgments of each package and sometimes error checking too.

In addition to the two speeds there are four types of transfer that can take place on the bus, not all of which are available at both speeds. They each have different characteristics, for example "isochronous transfer" guarantees to transfer data at a constant rate because it is time critical, like digital audio data.

The price you pay for this is that the integrity of the data is not guaranteed, you might experience

about, USB?

the odd drop out. This would typically be used for audio data where a missed byte can be masked but there is no time to re-send the data.

On the other hand the "Bulk transfer" mode is used by printers where the data has to be correct and it is no great disaster if a package has to be sent again. It is these different transfer modes that make the USB so flexible, see the table for a list of the transfer types and typical uses.

The USB also has a distance limit, any one cable can be as long as 5 metres but as you can have up to five hubs passing on data you can get 6 segments of cables giving the longest distance of 30 metres from the computer. Other busses can be used over much longer distances but the USB was not designed for such applications.

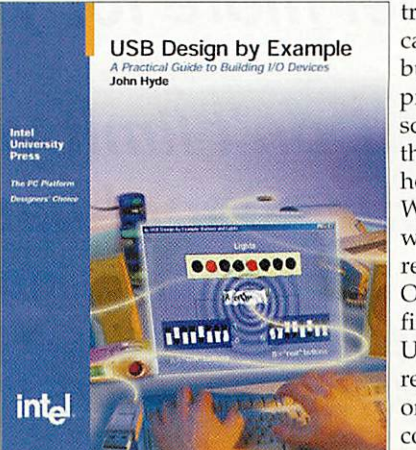
Applications

So how is this magic used? The secret to the USB is software, all the protocols for communicating are strictly laid out along what should happen in the event of any errors. This is quite complex software and it might seem that this is a barrier to its widespread use.

However, all of the complication is hidden from the user by the use of host software and USB drivers, it's plug and play. Even application, or driver writers are spared most of the complication of this software by the operating system.

Basically all an application has to do is to ask the host software, which is part of the operating system, what devices it has found. It then identifies a target and then tells the host to start communicating with it. Each device on the USB can be identified in several ways, perhaps the most universal is by type and class.

Here a device can say, for example, it is a "human interface" type, with a class of "mouse". If that were to be the case the host software would know what to do with that class of device and no further drivers or application would be needed. Have you ever used a computer with two mice? It's a great source of practical jokes.



Other types and classes could also be supported in decent host software like the bulk storage type with a class of CD reader or hard drive. Other devices like a printer would need drivers writing, these would be exactly the same as the drivers we need at the present but they would direct their output towards the USB port instead of the parallel or serial port.

Therefore all the existing printer drivers could easily be patched by a single application. Note however that the USB knows nothing about what data a printer needs, it only knows how to communicate with it. So having a USB printer and a USB port on your computer is no better that a parallel printer and a parallel port, you still need a driver. Sorry to disappoint anyone who thought otherwise.

What we don't know about the Omega yet is how good the USB port will be. Will it support isochronous transfer used for web cams? Will it support bulk transfer for printers and scanners? What will the operating system host support be like? We will just have to wait and see but remember that the Omega is only the first, I am sure that USB should be regarded as essential on any modern computer.

I have only just scratched the surface here so if you are interested in the USB protocol and want to make USB devices to connect to the bus I would recommend two books on the subject:

USB Complete by Jan Axelson, Pub. Lakeview Research ISBN 0-9650819-3-1. A detailed look at what is needed at both ends of the bus.

USB Design by Example by John Hyde, Pub. Wiley ISBN 0-471-37048-7. More technical with design examples and a wide selection of USB devices reviewed.

Both books come with CDs and are biased towards the Windows operating system at the host end. However, most of this host functionality is required no matter what the operating system so the information is easily transferable.

END

Transfer type	Control	Bulk	Interrupt	Isochronous
Typical use	Configuration	printer / scanner	mouse, keyboard	Audio
Required?	yes	no	no	no
Allowed on low speed devices	yes	no	yes	no
Error correcting	yes	yes	yes	no
Guaranteed delivery rate	no	no	no	yes
Guaranteed latency [0]	no	no	yes	yes
Full speed (max data bytes/ms)	832 [1]	1216 [2]	64	1023
Low speed (max data bytes/ms)	24 [3]	not allowed	0.8 [4]	not allowed

0 Time between transfers
1 13 x 64-byte transfers
2 19 x 64-byte transfers
3 in three 8 byte transfers
4 8 bytes per 10 milliseconds



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Word is spreading that Acorn / RISCOS machines are returning into schools. HTML software titles are becoming available from software houses that will run under the RISCOS platform using Castle's Oregano software.

Thin Client Technology Independent Computing Architecture (ICA)

This is a system to provide cross-platform software compatibility with low client station capital and running costs, whilst providing higher levels of reliability. To explain, you need a network infrastructure, an NT server and any number of Thin Client computers, or Network Computers (NCs). All the Thin Clients are controlled from a central NT server (or servers), which hold user configurations that are centrally administered and thus client systems cannot be re-configured locally; this minimises client station problems. As NCs have no floppy disc drive it is impossible to introduce viruses or indeed pirate software from these client stations. Other standard desktop computers can also be added to the system if required and these can comprise a mix of Acorns, AppleMacs and PCs. ICA is a cost effective way of extending the useful life of your existing older Acorn (or PC) computers, many of which will probably be mechanically sound for a good few years yet.

If your school requires a demonstration or site visit then please contact us.

Tel: 01279 730800 / 900

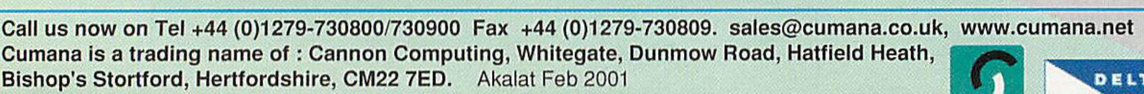
Fax: 01279 730809

e-mail: sales@cumana.co.uk



www.cumana.co.uk















BETT 2001 Awards

Comedian Fred MacAuley presented the BETT Awards this year. There were over 400 nominations with teachers from all over the UK voting for the overall winners across 13 categories, in addition the *Innovation* and *Top 20* awards were decided by a panel of judges.

And this is how the results of the voting went:

Online Learning Resource (Free)		
	www.mathsyear2000.org	Maths Year 2000
Online Learning Resource (Subscription)		
	www.atschool.co.uk	Pedegog
Education Software in Primary Schools		
	ReviseWise Series	BBC Educational Publishing
Education Software in Secondary Schools		
	Force and Motion	Fable Multimedia
Software Tools in Primary Schools		
	Numbers, Words and Pictures	Black Cat
Software Tools in Secondary Schools		
	Workspace Explorer	CSE
Interactive Multimedia Content		
	Out and About	SEMERC
ICT Hardware in Primary Schools		
	Intel Play QX3 Computer Microscope	Tag Learning
ICT Hardware in Secondary Schools		
	Airport	Apple
Support Service		
	The Learning Network	Bolton Curriculum ICT Centre
Special Education Needs (Software)		
	Out and About	SEMERC
Special Education Needs (Hardware)		
	JAMC@M 3.0 and JAMSTUDIO	Tag Learning
Top 20		
		Crick Software
Innovation		
	iBook and Airport	Apple
School Management Solution		
	Numeracy Complete and Literacy Complete	Skills Factory

Cities online

A new colourful online service of graphical cross-curricular games and exercises for Key States 1, 2 and 3 can now be accessed via **www.EducationCity.net**

Education City (01458 254709) has been designed to improve standards of attainment through fun challenges. The Web site is split into two sections, Primary and Secondary. The Secondary section covers maths, English, French, German, science and topics with exercises such as *Ready, Steady, Bake*. This is set in a restaurant kitchen where Stig and Sten ask students to mark out a fraction of a cake and then deliver it.

Meanwhile, the Primary section includes exercises for English, science, maths as well as common primary topics. Thus *Shop for Fun* asks children to pay the correct sum for a range of items for sale on a market stall.

Teachers can tailor exercises to focus of questions and topics to suit their children, as well as monitoring progress against curriculum Key Stage targets. Education City costs £60 per subject at Primary level rising to £150 per module for Secondary school.

In brief

Logotron alone

Pearson Education has sold educational-software house Logotron to its management team for an undisclosed sum. The team is headed by Managing Director, Julian Pixton and the company plans to keep its long-time base in Cambridge.

This makes Logotron (01223 425558) the largest privately owned educational-software publisher in Europe. "This will allow us to accelerate the development of our ground-breaking educational technologies," commented Pixton.

Saying goodbye

Rickitt Educational Media (REM) have been bought out by Paul Tuff and David Bennett. This ensures that REM retains its independent status, and while founder Martin Rickitt steps down as Managing Director, he will continue to act as adviser for the meantime.

Future plans include a significant investment in the development of Web-based sales, delivery and content. Access www.r-e-m.co.uk

Weather watchers

New resources for studying the weather are now available from The Advisory Unit for Computer in Education (01707 266714). These take the form of an extension pack for their Weather Reporter automatic weather station.

The system enables schools to make automatic records, daily or hourly of wind speed and directions, temperature, sunshine and daylight hours, rainfall, pressure and humidity. This information can then be saved as used as CSV data for work in geography, maths, science and ICT.

The new pack includes a Resource Module that consists of teaching materials; a Display Module that enables live weather data to be viewed at local network stations; and a Web Module for creating automatically updated Weather Reporter data on school Web pages.

Contacting me

Pam Turnbull:
educ@acornuser.com

Free for all

Pam Turnbull looks at a nice little extra lurking on Softease's new range of educational products

When you buy any of the new *TextEase* products you'll find a section on the CD-ROM called Curriculum. This holds a set of curriculum resources divided into 11 subject areas which will run with one or more components of *TextEase Studio* or you can download these from the Softease Web site. But should you bother?

The first thing I noticed was that someone had been paying attention to the colour coding of the National Curriculum and that the activities had been designed to cover the requirements to use *ICT in other subjects*.

Diving into the first set I accessed Key Stage 1 and 2 files on Art and Design. Using the word bank you can create patterns of shapes before using the fill tool and *TextEase 2000*'s new polygon tool as Key Stage 1 children explore visual elements.

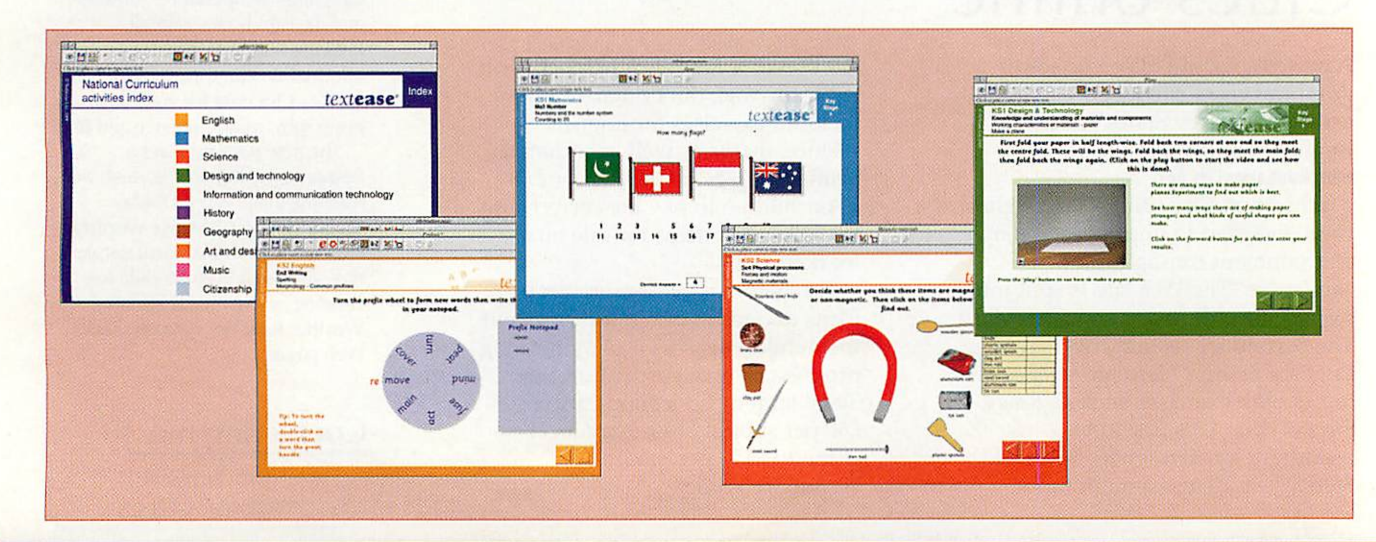
For Key Stage 2 there was a Christmas card to design and use but this was more than a little temperamental and hung my machine. Do ensure that you are familiar with the tools and ensure that the right selection are available on the toolbar before you let the children loose. Moving on to the core subject of English, there are files for Key Stages 1 to 4. Again colour-coded and with very clear links to the National Curriculum learning objectives there are colourful activities well supported by sound on phonemic awareness and knowledge (syllables and same sounds in particular), letter recognition and CVC construction. For Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 there is prefix wheel, punctuation passage, magazine cover to construct again using the world bank to store words, phrases and images, while for Key Stage 4 there is an advert to write mixing fact and opinion.

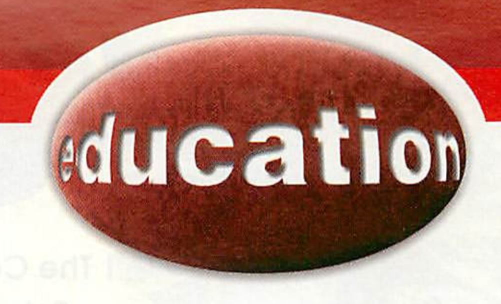
There there is Maths: counting to 20 with simple but effective images, audio and animation, rounding to 5 and 10, as well as the characteristics of 2D shapes. Key Stage 4 resources are to follow. At about this time I became concerned that I was missing things and some of the files didn't seem to be working as they should.

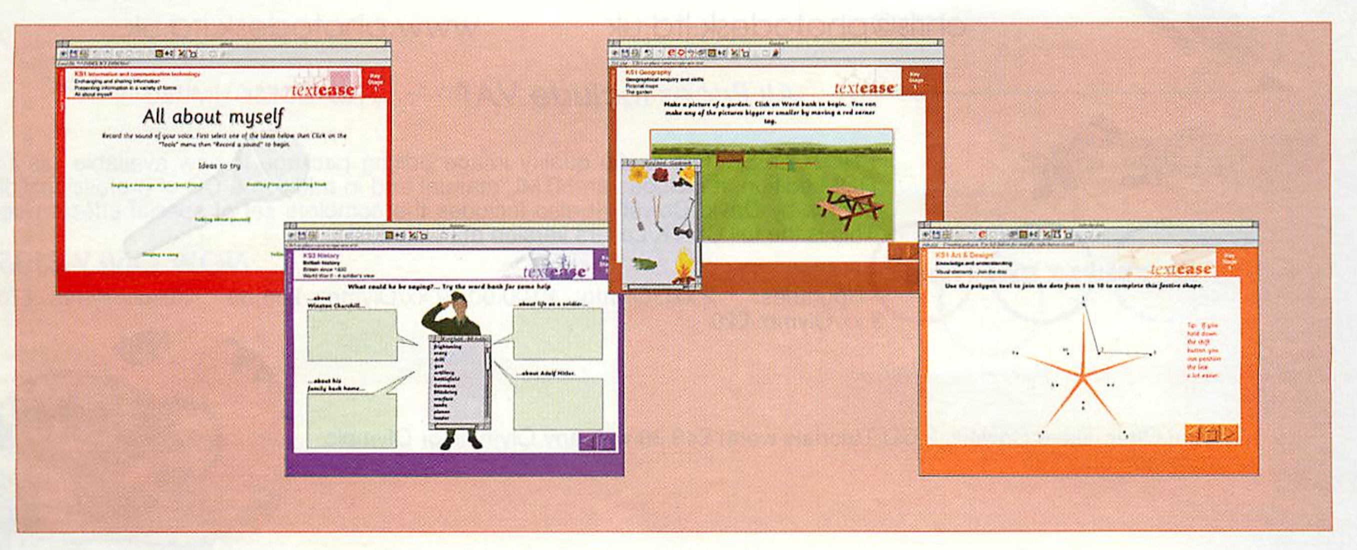
Following up with science, there are activities for Key Stages 1 with animals, living and never lived, parts of the human head, foods and parts of a horse. While Key Stage 2 offers pages on pulse rate, magnetic materials and naming parts of a skeleton. Finally Key Stage 3 covers nutrition and rock formations.

These resources were not as well organised as I would like. You can dive into each subject and find the screen/activity you want. However, a better first-time route is to go the the index directory and then load the subject index (SUBJECX1). You'll then see the recognisable colour coding and access the subject then Key Stage and finally the activity you're interested in. Using this route activities and subjects are linked using *TextEase*'s built-in linking.

There are over 80 activities available at present with more (especially for Key Stages 3 and 4) on the way. Green-backed Design and Technology has offerings for primary schools only. Younger children explore paper-based constructs such as cylinders which they see being made courtesy of a movie clip, while slightly older children look at the







properties of different materials with obvious links to maths and science respectively.

All About Myself is the topic for Key Stage 1 ICT with a booklet of tables and charts to complete as well as recording voices straight into *TextEase* — great fun for all. However, Key Stage 2 children design a poster naming the parts of a computer before listing 10 things you can use one for — a nice introductory exercise for Year 3.

History was my next port of call and offered here for the youngest was a jigsaw of famous leaders. This was a little tricky for this age group especially for those with poor motor control. There is also a chance to put Olympic events into chronological order, which is a challenging activity but which could prove a useful follow up or extension.

Key features of the Crimean War; a class survey on fast food; facts and emotions about using a Gas Mask in World War 2 and an interview to write up with an imaginary Victorian Family are on offer for 7 to 11-year olds. While Key Stage 3 students use the same technique with a knight and World War 2 soldier, again using the word bank to help with spellings and ideas.

Geographers will find *Gardens* and *Litter* featured, as well as a traffic survey for primary schools, while secondary students can use their knowledge of the water cycle to add a key to a talking diagram.

So far there is only one activity for music and that cover the ideas of pitch with Key Stage 1. I found that disappointing as there is a huge scope for simple music composition in *TextEase*.

At present, citizenship is only taught at secondary school and here there are files for Key Stage 3 and 4. The younger of the two groups look at the European Union. This activity is not very thrilling being a piece of text to read and then to answer questions about it, but it's followed by the opportunity to build a debate between two characters. This is followed by a Key Stage 4 activity where students have to put their own views forward in an imaginary piece for the local newspaper.

Some of the activities are contained one page, while others take the form a mini-project using a simple forward/backward/home button system to navigate. Some exercises feature a lifebelt icon which gives children or students a quick glimpse of the correct punctuation or labels required. Younger users are rewarded with animations of wandering numbers or letters and here feedback (audio and visual) is immediate, with other activities it is the teacher who will act as auditor.

As well as using good quality images and an attractive cursive font, the instructions are written but by clicking on them *TextEase* will read it all out to you. In addition many of the activities features *tips* on how to use new tools or how to make the most of what's on offer.

All use the facilities of *TextEase* are available and while these activities are useful and fit well into National Curriculum, Literacy and Numeracy framework initiatives, the beauty of this is that it may well persuade more teachers to use the computer within class activities by designing their own activities. Especially once they discover the versatility of the word bank.

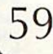
In essence this is a taster of what you can produce with *TextEase* adding animation, sound, video simply and effectively to documents to create attractive and worthwhile classroom activities for all ages. My niggles concern the presentation of the files within the directories which is messy and confusing as to what you click first.

True, the structure makes it easy to take out what you need or edit screens to fit with your teaching. And while nothing disastrous happens if blunder around click-happy, this organisation — or lack of it — does not enhance some excellent resources.

Having said that SoftEase have informed me they are adding even more resources and fixing some of the problems — from such a reliable and decent company, I look forward to it. END

Product details

Product:	TextEase National Curriculum Resources
Ages:	5 to 15
Price:	FREE with all new TextEase products or downloaded from Web site
Supplier:	SoftEase, Market Place, Ashbourne, Derbyshire DE16 1ES
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Fax:	(+44/0) 1335 343422
Web:	www.textease.com
E-mail:	sales@softease.co.uk





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OHP is a screen-based presentation package for use with RISC OS computers.

OHP lets you compile Presentations comprised of a number of graphics files, which you create or purchase outside OHP, and show them on your computer's VDU as a full-screen presentation. OHP has facilities to order the graphics, give them consistent styling, add sound effects and help you present them to an audience. If you have access to an electronic projector, you can use that to project the presentation onto a screen.

The read-only version, OHP_Show (which is Freeware) can be given away with your presentations or used on any number of computers; this makes OHP presentations an ideal way of communicating or advertising.



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But is it art?

Richard Skegg gets snap happy in his classroom

Way back in the days before the A5000 was new, digital cameras had already started appearing. They were not the all-singing all-dancing models that we have today. The first camera that I used with pupils was a Canon. It needed a digitizer called TechnoEye. Storage was on a mini-floppy disc and it seemed reasonably speedy at the time, unfortunately the quality of the images produced was not brilliant.

The current digital cameras are vastly superior to those early models particularly in terms of functionality. However, no matter how many pixels, megapixels, etc. that they have one feature that is worth checking out is the quality of lens. A cheap digital camera, no matter how functions it has, the picture quality is still only as good as its lens.

The storage media is one that may not occur to non-educational users as important. The three current methods are: Compact flash, Smart media and floppy disc. It's worth thinking about these in terms of being handled by pupils. When I was considering a camera for use in school, one of the prime concerns was that of the storage.

I felt that the SmartMedia cards were not particularly robust when being handled by large numbers of pupils. The contacts are visible and very touchable. The card seems



rather flimsy. Floppy discs were robust but lacked capacity. It would be possible to carry a stack of floppies but not practical for students.

I finally opted for CompactFlash. It has a reasonable robustness and all the contacts are hidden. The storage available was quite good too and, with the advent of the 1Gb IBM Microdrive (the size of a matchbook), looks like it's going to go on expanding. However, as I discovered after I left a card in a shirt that went through the wash, even CompactFlash can be ruined.

Another consideration was cost. This is a matter of balancing cost of the camera, against number bought and the damage inflictable on it. Putting it another way, which would you rather do; let pupils lose with a camera costing in excess of £300 or having two cheaper and less well-featured cameras?

I have observed that pupils are generally very good with expensive items and although I was initially worried the first time I let some pupils take one of the cameras they were very good with them. If anything pupils are quite wary of such small expensive items. Thinking along this line I would strongly advise anyone using such cameras at school to follow the age-old practice of clearly marking them clearly and visibly. Also I have one other small trick. Somewhere inside the item I put a small slip of paper with the school's name and address for additional security.

As part of this article I was loaned a Casio QV-8000SX by Neil Farnham-Smith of Surftec. A rather neat piece of kit. It uses CompactFlash as its storage media which is in its favour but trying to access the card was initially confusing. One has to open the compartment for the card, depress and release a spring-loaded button, press the button down to eject the card and press it down further to re-engage the button. I know that sounds rather long-winded but imagine a child trying to use it for the first time?

One of the features that does impress me about the more expensive and newer cameras is the ability to take a short movie. The movie format used on the Casio is a QuickTime format, an AVI. One area that quickly came to my mind was that of sports days. It could take 'movies' of the end to races. There was enough for three 10 second movies on an 8Mb card. The only drawback is that there was no way that I could play them on a RISC OS machine — though the camera can do it.

I normally used a Kodak 200 series 'megapixel' camera. Which lacks many of the features of the Casio but does have a greater range of resolutions available. However both cameras, and other digital cameras I have used, suffer from one drawback. After one takes the picture there is a delay of at least four seconds as the camera saves the image. This is really irritating.

The single biggest problem for RISC OS user has to be transferring images from the various cards. With the Smart Media cards there is a 'floppy disc' mechanism available. One places the card inside the mechanism and puts into the floppy drive. Providing one has the software installed all is well. Disappointingly it's not available for RISC OS.

Only the Sony Mavica overcomes transfer with the images stored on floppy disc. However even this is a

problem for my computers. We use NCs and they do not have a disc drive. Neither do they have a serial port so we are scuppered again as we can't use any serial port software. Surftec's *Digiflash* would seem to provide an answer for us and I await the necessary drivers for NCs. Once we have those it makes it much more viable.

Curriculum use

I cannot think of one area in the school that would not benefit from a digital camera. The ones that I'll mention are only a few. I hope that they might give you some ideas of your own.

Towards the end of the summer term at Winton School our Year 10s are off on work experience, the Year 11s have finished their GCSEs and no longer appear on the scene. This leaves us with Years 7, 8 and 9. The Mathematics, Science and Technology departments run a project called 'In-Control' that involves Year 9 pupils doing lots of work to do with control technology; Our Year 7s go off to a camp; this leaves Year 8.

The school organises a series of workshops arranged around a common theme which in the last academic year was theatre-based and involved groups of pupils producing scenes from different Victorian/Edwardian based musicals. To keep a record of all the activities in Years 7, 8 and 9 one group of the Year 8s produce a daily newssheet/paper.

The Head of English usually organises this and the entire IT suite is turned into a newsroom for the duration. A photographic record of all the activities is kept using both conventional and digital photograph. Pupils booked out the digital cameras that we had. With their return it was then a matter of downloading the images, via a laptop, and cleaning them up in RISC OS which can be a tedious affair.

Pupils were then able to crop and alter the images according to their needs. However using the camera was a liberating experience for them as they could take a several images of the same scene and choose the best one. There was no waiting for any processing and it was quite easy to crop the images. Using programs such as ProArt 2, ProArt24 and ImageMaster it is possible to achieve some very respectable effects. We managed camera-use timetabling by organising a rota.

One could take several cameras on school educational visits. The images could be downloaded and the cards released back for immediate use. Pupils may have digital cameras of their own and could be encouraged, with suitable reminders about the attendant risks, to bring them along. Again, the images can be stored on a portable.

The Geography Department at Winton do a project on Southampton that contributes to GCSE coursework. In the past pupils might have taken along their own cameras to record the necessary pictures to illustrate the work. This academic year one of the members of staff took a digital camera along. He took a whole series of images which were cleaned up, using *JClean* and resized using *ChangeFSI* by the ICT Technician.

The Geography teacher and Technician worked together going through the images to tidy them up. These were placed in the shared area on the school network so that pupils could access them for inclusion in their course work. Several downloaded them onto floppy disc for use at home.

Progressive results

In Science lessons a digital camera can be used to record an experiment as it progresses. Many's the time I've wanted to put on the worksheet a picture of what to look for. With a record of what's required or what to look for, the worksheet becomes much more interesting. This raises a major issue; printing in colour.

Although you have a whole set of marvellous digital images that you have put on a worksheet or the pupils want to print out within their work what do you do about the colour? It is a matter of cost. For most schools a colour laser photocopier is still a touch too expensive for printing coloured worksheets; printing from a colour laser printer is an option but again it's a matter of having one and the cost; one can safely rule out using an ink jet to mass-produce worksheets on two factors, cost and time.

In a Secondary school to allow all pupils to print out work in colour is time consuming unless you have lots of colour ink jets. This in turn means replacing colour cartridges and again cost comes into the equation. It all becomes frustrating at that point. On the plus side HTML does provide a way of displaying work on screen and displaying colour images. Pupils can create their work in whatever program they wish to (my current favourite is Textease) and convert the work to a Web page.

Going back to Science what would be useful would be the ability to trigger the camera with an external event. Out of the four digital cameras I have used there was no facility to do this. The Casio did have a time-lapse facility which means that it could be left to run through a series of shots if the experiment had to be left. On the thought of time-lapse however because the new cameras can take movies it is possible to use them to carry out real-life speed calculations. Again it is the ability to


A shot without zoom

then with full lens zoom



take the camera out on field trips, as in Geography, and share the resulting images easily.

Food for thought

Coursework for GCSE Food Technology requires that the students prepare various dishes and evaluate them. In most subjects the material produced can be stored and shown to a moderator at some future date. Not so in Food Technology — food has this unfortunate habit of going off. The solution that for several years was used was to photograph the 'coursework' and use the photographs.

A big disadvantage with this was that the film had to be sent off for processing. This meant at least a week before the pictures could be seen or even if taken to a rapid processor there is always a time delay. If the item prepared is perishable, as most food is, and the photographs are blurred, lost or some other catastrophe occurs there is a big problem. The digital camera provides a much better alternative. The pictures can seen immediately and if unsuitable retaken. This means that the pupil's work can be shown to it's best advantage. Blurred images can be rejected and only the best images selected. These can then be printed off. For such important work a good quality colour ink jet printer using photo-quality paper should be used.



Full zoom plus x8 digital zoom

finally with x32 digital (a tripod would help)



In Design and Technology where pupils are doing Resistant Materials the stages of construction can be recorded using a digital camera and incorporated into the coursework to show the progression that has occurred. The use of the images in the presentation can be very impressive. In any research using a digital camera can prove invaluable.

For packaging, actual packing can be bulky to put into coursework. Digital images of the packaging can be easier to include and make annotation easier. Obviously a scanner can provide a similar function. However not for 3D objects. Think of the digital camera as a 3D scanner. Objects that one cannot scan can be photographed. Also textures comes to mind. One may take images for textiles, packaging, or Art and use them without infringing copyright. The images can be manipulated and be used creatively in the pupil's work.

Digital cameras and PE may not seem immediate bedfellows but consider the use of the camera to capture and illustrate various postures and moves on handouts.

It is the field trip that seems to cover a large number of uses of the digital camera. History and Religious Studies trips, suitably recorded can be used to illustrate worksheets and act as reminders later in the course for pupils.

In terms of school publicity and displays a digital camera is a brilliant piece of kit. We have used the camera to capture images for use in the school-parent magazine. Although not in colour it does add value to it. Certainly putting up images from our sports day the following morning was a real wow for the children. Again it is this immediacy that captures the imagination.

If your school photographer doesn't supply you with a CD-ROM with the pupil's photographs the digital camera can be used as a reasonable substitute. Although I have been teaching for many years I still find that children's names may escape me on occasions, in particular parent's evenings. If you take a photograph of your classes you can easily annotate them and keep them at the ready as a reminder.

School producing their own Web sites means that a digital camera is a must. However, the use of Web pages and the Internet does bring one point into focus about the use of digital images with children in them. While looking at some French school Web sites recently I noticed that several children's faces were blurred. This was done so that the children could not be identified.

One local education authority in Scotland, I believe, now has policy that primary school pupils in particular must not be able to be clearly identified from digital images placed on Web sites. General shots seem to be allowable but closer shots are a 'no-no'. It's worth thinking about.

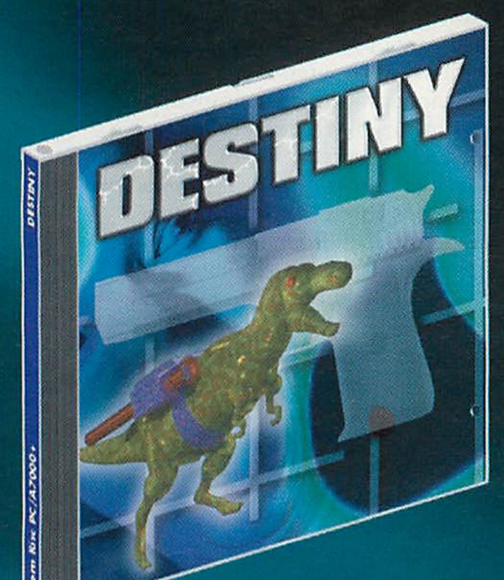
A digital camera really can make a positive contribution to pupil's learning. I would suggest that when you buy one or two or three, try them out first. Go for the one that you feel most comfortable with. I have managed to ruin several good shots with my Kodak because a finger managed to get in the way. Check out the camera that you buy doesn't have a lens that you can cover up with a finger.

As a footnote to all of this I had intended to take lots of pictures and use them to illustrate this article. However I had real problems transferring the images. Before anyone thinks that was due to RISC OS and any failure there, it wasn't. I have a Jessop CompactFlash card reader attached to my RISC PC which I have used for transferring images.

I tried using it, via the PC card, to read the CompactFlash card from the Casio. It point blank refused to do so. Even when attached to my PC laptop there were problems. I ended up using the PC card reader on my laptop to read the Casio card, storing them on the PC. placing the images on my Kodak Compact Flash card and reading that on the Risc PC. That's life. END

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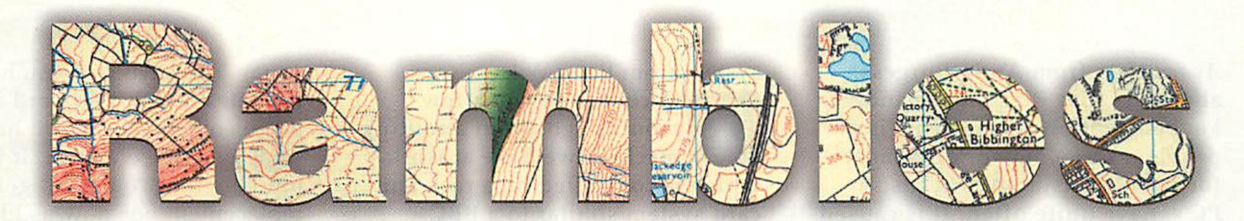
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RISC OS



Mike Cook studies the map for clues

Most people have tag lines on the end of their e-mail signatures, most are supposed to be funny and occasionally some are, like this one I came across this month:
Windows: A 32-bit shell for a 16-bit operating system, originally written for an 8-bit processor on a 4-bit bus by a 2-bit company that can't stand 1-bit of competition!

Well I threw a challenge to you utility writers the other month and I am delighted to say someone has taken up the gauntlet. I am even more delighted that I tempted a new author into the field.

He is James Shaw from Abbotskerswell and he writes:

Q "In response to an article in your column of the Christmas *Acorn User*, I have made an icon-hunting program. It will search for icons with the same name comparing a master file and various applications' sprite files and rename/delete them.

"I am using Justin Fletcher's excellent BASIC libraries which is a great help to me. This is the first application that I am releasing into the public domain. I would appreciate any help you could give me on how to get my program out there."

A Well James, a great first step is to send it in to *Acorn User*, I see you have followed this advice already. For further coverage you could start your own Web site and put it on there, or contact anyone with an Acorn-based Web site I am sure they would only be to happy to include your offerings on their site.

Finally you can just send it of to one of the PD libraries they are always willing to accept new material. If I could make a recommendation it would be to try an make your applications stand-alone as personally I find it frustrating having to go off and add third party files that are not included in the distributed application, I am sure I am not alone in this.

Anyway keep up the good work and now you have a taste for I hope you get to distribute many more applications.

In fact James did have another offering which he included:

Q "I have also written Number Crunch 2, this is an educational program but I am aware that there is a problem with it. If you run it on an A7000+ running RISC OS 3.7 it crashes when you come to exit.

"I have trapped the escape and break keys using OS_Byte 200,1 to lock and OS_Byte 200,0 to unlock. Is there any reason why this shouldn't work? The surprise is that there is no problem when running on my A5000 running RISC OS 3.11."

A I had a look at this and have a few comments. First of all this is not a desktop application which makes handling the environment a bit more hit and miss. Better to declare it to the Wimp as a task even if you never call **Wimp_Poll**, so you can exit seamlessly with **Wimp_Close Down**.

Also I noticed that in your exit procedure you have a ***Desktop** command and you really only need a standard **END** statement here.

Finally, this is a maths drill exercise but I feel you have not given enough attention to testing it for usability. There are no instructions on how to quit the application, the backspace key doesn't work preventing you from correcting a mistake and finally the input buffer isn't cleared at the start so that an unsuccessful attempt to enter your 'teachers key' will result in junk numbers being entered for your first answer.

I find that when I am writing a 'robust' program, that is one intended for release to a non technical public, I need to spend longer in writing the routines for handling erroneous user input than for the whole of the rest of the application.

I did have another very helpful reply on the same topic, two letters from the same person, but unfortunately the letters have temporarily disappeared in a tidy-up black hole, apologies and like all good black holes they will emerge some time in the future, or past!

I got another piece of feedback from John (second name not supplied) via e-mail, he writes:

I "With reference to one of the queries in the Rambles section of the Christmas

Acorn User **from Andy Burgess about his Risc PC's mouse and keyboard not working. This is a problem I as a network manager for a school using Acorn Risc PC's, have quite often. It is caused by a 2A fuse on the motherboard close to the keyboard socket blowing.**

"This is usually caused by plugging the mouse or keyboard in when the computer is on — but should be able to be repaired for a very small fee by someone with good soldering skills. The fuse supplies power to the mouse, which won't work properly without it."

Now Tony Evans has a bit of a follow up on some feedback:



"I do enjoy reading your column even though I never follow it up in a practical sense. However the current issue has a piece from Don Scott that made me take notice.

"In particular the car battery as a source of power as the most common way is via an inverter — expensive! I'm going to have a go but I can't immediately lay my hands on the manuals and can't remember which pin is which on the 9 way D connector."



The information is in the Welcome guide, and if you get a plug or socket it is printed on the back of them. In fact it was my inability to read these numbers that prompted me to the fact that I actually needed glasses.

Anyway look at the connector from the front (the side you are going to plug things in to), with the short edge of the D shape facing downwards, pin 1 is the top left hand pin. The number in sequence along the top row until pin 5, the top right pin. Then the lower row has pin 6 on the left with pin 9 on the right.

Next a follow-up on an ancient system from Peter Wilcox:



"I contacted you a few months ago about a routing machine we have at work which is controlled by a rack and card system similar to a BBC Micro and was made by Cambridge Micro Systems. I have been unable to find much else out about the system, the people who actually built the routing machine and fitted the control system don't even seem to know much about it.

"My problem at the moment is that the keyboard is in a poor state, key caps missing and so on, and we'd like to fit a new one. The connector on the keyboard is the same as the connector on an AT keyboard so we tried an AT keyboard but nothing happened. Key presses did nothing, Caps lock and Num lock LEDs remained off.

"I tried another AT keyboard and again key presses did nothing, but the caps lock, num lock and scroll lock LEDs flashed on and off simultaneously and continuously at a constant rate. I have looked at the connections on an AT keyboard and only 4 out of 5 of the pins on the plug were used.

"On the original keyboard with the machine all 5 pins are used. There are 3 ICs in the original keyboard, they are SN74LS125AN, SN7406N and SR0082. The first two are an inverter IC and a buffer IC but I can't find out what the SR0082 is.

"Have you any idea what keyboard I need or how to modify another keyboard to work? I read somewhere on the Internet that Acorn used to produce their own rack and card computer called System 1 or something. Was this at all similar to the Cambridge Micro Systems computer that is in our machine?"



I did mention your original enquire a few months back but I have had no response so far. The keyboard you have predates the AT keyboard and it is just a coincidence that it has the same type of connector. It is very unlikely that you could get a replacement one now as I have only seen PC type keyboards for years.

In those days a keyboard was a major expense costing well over £100 for a standalone model. I have failed to find anything on the SR0082 chip, but from the number of connections I would suspect that it uses a serial protocol.

At that time asynchronous keyboards were popular and easy to connect to the Model B because the software in the machine was designed to accept serial keyboard input.

The system you have is basically a Model B re-engineered to fit into a rack system and used for industrial applications. If the company that sold you the system has no information on it it is probable that the employee that was responsible for it has left and not produced any documentation.

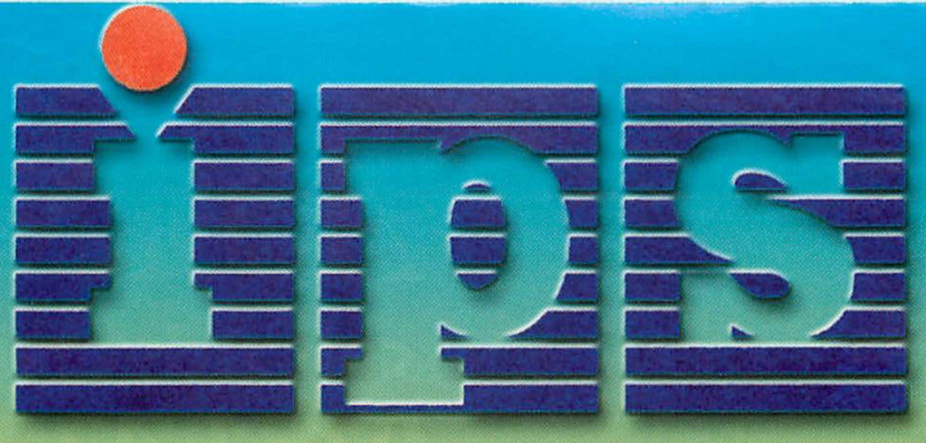
It would be possible to design a PIC based project to convert from an AT keyboard to this standard. I know some one was selling a similar converter to use PC type keyboards on old Archimedes machines. Alternatively you can run a serial terminal emulator from a computer and feed it straight in.

The original Acorn Series 1 system was the predecessor to the Acorn Atom and as such nothing like the Model B that the Cambridge system was based on.

It had no BASIC language and only a very crude operating system allowing memory examine and change, as well as loading and saving to audio tape.

Contacting AU

Mike Cook:
rambles@acornuser.com



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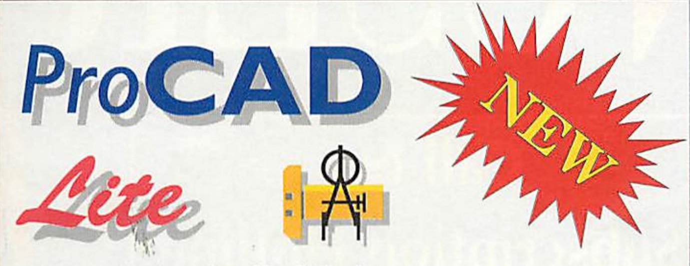
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Olympic pi

Having been the owner of an Olympus C-2020Z digital camera for nearly a year, I was most interested in your review of the camera in the February *Acorn User*.

I have been eminently pleased with the camera and found that is satisfies virtually all my (sometimes demanding) requirements. There are, however a few problem areas which were not mentioned in the review. It is very irritating that in order to switch the camera on, one has to remember to manually remove the lens cap. If you forget, loud crunching noises from the gears quickly remind you.

The camera has an attachment thread which provides the means of attaching supplementary lenses — and presumably a lens hood which foxed the reviewer.

Unfortunately for the users, though not for Olympus, the thread is not the normal standard 40.50mm, but their own 41.00mm. It is necessary therefore to buy an Olympus adaptor. The adaptor is from 41mm to 43mm and although 43 is a standard, it is a less common one. My only other criticism of the camera itself is the flimsy tripod mounting bush.

The software is another matter. Your reviewer showed a screenshot of the clipboard with the thumbnails numbered from 1 to 15. All very well, but when the files are in a filing folder they are arranged 1, 10-15 and 2-9.

This surely is a most elementary programming blunder. Leading zeros would solve the problem at a stroke.

The other programming deficiency as far as I am concerned is the apparent impossibility of retrieving the date and time information which is stored with each shot. I cannot find how to get it.

As I said at the outset, I am highly satisfied with the camera. Your pictures in the review do not, in my opinion do justice to the camera which I now use, among many other things, for copying photographs in preference to a flat-bed scanner because of the resulting better tonal range.

Keith Reedman
Derbyshire

Un-connectivity

With reference to Martin Hodgson's article in the February 2001 issue, I already have an account with Supanet.com on my Windows PC so I thought it would be nice to access this same account on my Risc PC, especially in view of the above article. Unfortunately, I have totally failed to find the file OFFL/INS on my Supanet CD Rom, although the other file SIGNUP/ISP is there, albeit in $.SYSTEM and not in IE5.

Can anyone suggest what other name it might have, as there are almost 4,800 files on the CD, which would take an awful lot of looking through.

Ron Collins
roncollins@supanet.com

One option is to put the CD in the Risc PC and use the Risc PC's file search facility. At least you could then verify whether it is, or is not, there.

BETT 2001 report

I like to visit BETT with a set task in mind, otherwise it can be a very confusing and overwhelming experience. I recently bought six RiscStations for my school, so I set myself the task this year of investigating networking possibilities as well as using the name "RISC OS" in the presence of as many software houses as possible.

My first port of call had to be Castle Technology. I was aware that

Capable Web use?

After reading Chris Bell and Alan's comments in *Acorn User* January 2001 they both hit the nail on the head.

Though *Oregano* is being developed and is the preferred choice of browser along with *DialUp* opening up more accounts with ease, allowing me to drop *Argonet*. RISC OS is really dragging behind regarding some standards of the 'Net.

I know it's capable but where are RealAudio, MPEG movies with sound, WMV files and so on? The multimedia side is frustrating, though I am grateful to those who have made the effort to write programs which are free and made browsing easier and don't get paid for it. No other platform is so generous in that respect. I'm prepared to pay for products, nothing should be free.

So what are the chances of us enjoying these technologies with our Acorns? Is it up to Pace? What about Oregan Networks? Maybe the debate about our platform's direction should also view the software not just the new hardware which hasn't appeared — yet.

Brian Ferris
by e-mail

This letter asked some very important questions and I did begin to reply. But the reply grew and became the editorial for this issue.



ctures

they had chosen a double stand but it was great to see them displaying so much.

The Citrix demonstration told me everything I needed to know about networking my school's PCs and RISC OS machines together. And their thin clients are not only an inexpensive way of extending a RISC OS network, but they would also be a sensible choice for PC-only schools using Citrix and *TopCat*.

It was also impressive to note that I only saw this innovative network architecture, which I had heard so much about from lots of different people, being shown at Castle's stand.

Still with Castle, I was given a demonstration of writing HTML files in EasiWriter. I had been turned away from HTML converters after being put off by their inaccuracies or unnecessary complexity and had been composing my sites the old-fashioned way. I was shown how it is possible to create page section menus simply by setting the style of subheadings to header. *EasiWriter* then compiles these in a menu at the top of the page setting links to the different sections which is something that *MSWord* cannot do.

My next port of call was Sherston. As a teacher I am very concerned about the apparent diminishing support for RISC OS in terms of educational software. Sherston told me that their last triple platform CD-ROM will be released in only a few months time. After that time they will be publishing software using Macromedia *Director*.

Granada told me much the same thing, however, if we can get an up-to-date Flash reader and a QuickTime player then we will have no problem running the new software through *Oregano*.

Sherston, however, seem to have very close links with Apple. I was subsequently dragged off to the Apple stand to see their new Cube and MacOS X.

I have to say the new MacOS is stunning! There is an animated iconbar at the bottom that automatically enlarges and rotates as needed and their animation software is so beautifully smooth. I saw how PDF pictures can be edited using on-board PDF and Java support. I then watched astounded as a small PDF ship was dropped onto a rotating bottle creating a 3D label.

The Apple guy smugly demonstrated their real time refresh "just as RISC OS has always done" I said. And I still feel the single button is clumsy, necessitating a permanent Windows-style menu bar at the top of the screen.

Nevertheless, I asked for a price list (but beware, Apple are actively seeking RISCOS users to convert) and enquired as to the price of an upgradeable machine. At a mere slip over £1000 the Apple G4 is your box.

"But the Risc PC starts at just under £800" I hear you exclaim! Yeah, I left then too, but there was an uneasy impression left upon me.

That was, at least, until I visited RiscStation. I actually wanted to see their networking system from Surftec, using NCs. This looks really good, using new NC versions, of *Draw* and *Paint* and so on, enabling interactivity between RISC OS and Windows with an HTML front end.

However, I quickly moved towards the MIDI demonstration at the other end of the stand.

Wow! This would have been impressive on a high spec PC, yet here was a standard RiscStation at 56MHz replaying the most perfect quality sound you could imagine. With just a simple software package (£199 including MIDI synth) you can unlock the magic of the sound card that is already present in your standard RiscStation. Add a few beefy woofers and your machine is away.

You can record, edit and overlay sounds and, with *SoundCon*, save your files in any format (native filetypes are Data and Replay). This is a superb little package and the hardware involved is already inside the machine; hard to believe really.

Apple, eat my crotchets!

So, to sum up; I think the RISC OS side of things was well represented. It was great to see Citrix at the Castle stand as it could see RISC OS in through the back door of many schools.

Castle's other products continue to impress me: *Oregano* could renew the education software market for the platform if we can get *QuickTime* and *Flash* plug-ins. Icon's *EasiWriter* has renewed vigour in my mind and continues to impress me.

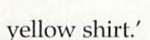
The RiscStation stand was impressive, to say the least, although I feel RiscStation should arrange a stand in a bit further from the fire doors next year! I had shown a number of colleagues my Osaris and they had gone off in search of one. However, they had not found the stand when I was about to leave and I had to physically direct them.

What was on offer from the RISC OS market was impressive and, although on a smaller scale to its competitors, could rival anything else I saw.

Fingers crossed that next year we can continue to see the growth that we ha ve already seen over the last twelve months.

Graham Wootton
by e-mail





Mark Gillard

The problem with using red onion in a quiche, is that it looks like ham. So you are all ready for what ham should taste like but there is that strange feeling of confusion because it turns out to be onion.

It was this sort feeling which came up when I was interviewing Mark Gillard because he looks very like Steve Turnbull (or maybe it is other way round). Mark too comes up with very bad jokes delivered completely dead-pan so, when I asked how he first got into computers, his reply was 'With a screwdriver'.

Mark is the Network and Education Consultant for CTA Direct and also co-ordinates Riscstation developments with Roy Heslop and associated developers.



'Current users should take the plunge'

'Before my active involvement at CTA, I managed a network of computers in a school near Lancaster,' begins Mark. 'Which had a WindowsNT server and both Windows and RISC OS clients. I also trained the staff to improve their ICT skills. Prior to working in the school, I was the Acorn specialist in an Apple centre, Holdens, working as part of the Xemplar Education team.'

There is a long list of people in the RISC OS world that have been on TV and Mark is high on the list, though not in connection with the Riscstation, but choral singing.

'The choir I currently sing with is quite special. We give very few concerts and we rehearse infrequently, getting together for a weekend at a time say, eight times a year — our main aim is simply to enjoy ourselves.

'It's called Choros Amici which, in no particular language, means Choir of Friends and that is exactly how and why we meet up. We entered the Sainsbury's Choir of the Year competition last year along with about three hundred other choirs and not only did we make it to the final of our section and earn the title Mixed Voice Choir of the Year, but we also went on to win the overall title of Sainsbury's Choir of the Year 2000.

'The final was held at the Royal Albert Hall and broadcast over Christmas on BBC2 — anyone watching carefully would have spotted me: the short, fat, bearded, and bespectacled chap in the black DJ and tasteful yellow shirt.'

It came as no surprise to find that Mark's degree was in music, he still plays piano at home, but there were times when he was out every night of the week with a different band, be it brass, choir or pop. At school he took vocational subjects such as Religious Studies, ancient Greek and Latin. He did use BBC B's but it was not until he went to university that he really got into computers, and he bought one.

The assistant in the computer shop in the Arndale Centre in Manchester recommended an Acorn A3000, because it could handle both word processing and music. Mark was the first student on his course to submit printed musical compositions and essays containing printed musical quotations. It's sweet that the machine was handed down to Mark's mum who likes to play Scrabble on it.

'Being on the inside, dealing with hardware developers and software programmers, I am aware of many projects which are currently undergoing development or testing and I also know of some proposed plans for the future. I find it very encouraging that professionals and businesses have enough faith in RISC OS that they are prepared to invest time, effort and money in new projects and products.

'Current users should take the plunge and invest in products software and hardware which are available now — so that developers know that there is still a market and are encouraged and financially able to continue supporting the community which supports them. However, in order for the RISC OS market to grow, we need to be expanding the user base by attracting new customers, entering new markets, and getting a new generation of users hooked'.

There are few things that Mark would still like to do, but one thing he would like is contentment. He would like to think, at the end of each day, that he had done some good — helped someone in some way and possibly made a difference to their life. Mark does seem to have built himself an environment to be content in.

'The living room of my house is painted in bright primary colours — red, yellow, and blue — with plasma lamps, lava lamps, fibre-optic lights and water fountains. Right in the middle is a huge widescreen TV with DVD and surroundsound speakers. When it comes to doing the things I enjoy, I give the matter serious consideration and priority. I like watching science-fiction films such as Star Wars and Star Trek, and horror films like A Nightmare on Elm Street and Hellraiser. Life's too short not to enjoy yourself and this isn't a rehearsal.'

Jill Regan